A BRIEF OUTLINE

OF THE

CAMPAIGN IN MESOPOTAMIA

1914-1918

BY

MAJOR (Temp. Lt.-Col.) R. EVANS,
M.C., P.S.C.

Royal Horse Guards.

LONDON: SIFTON PRAED & CO., LTD.,
THE MAP HOUSE, 67, ST. JAMES'S STREET, S.W. 1.

1926

U.T. TYLER LIBRARY

Printed in Great Britain
by Sifton Praed & Co., Ltd., St. James's, S.W. 1.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE.

Mesopotamia: A brief sketch of its history in relation to the Eastern policy of Great Britain; of its geographical and climatic characteristics; and of certain other factors which affected the problem of taking military action there. 1

CHAPTER II.

Events in the Middle East prior to the rupture with Turkey—The conflicting claims of general and local policy—The first step towards British action in Mesopotamia—The British Plan—Events up to the capture of Basra. 14

CHAPTER III.

Policy in Mesopotamia after the occupation of Basra—Political and strategical conditions governing the question of an advance—Baghdad the focal point of political ambition—The situation in the Middle East at the end of 1914—Preparations for the Turkish counter-offensive and German activities in South Persia necessitate increasing the size of the Expeditionary Force in Mesopotamia—The overthrow of the Turkish counter-offensive—The formation of the II Indian Army Corps—Its Commander's plans for the future. 18

CHAPTER IV.

The operations in Persian Arabistan in May, 1915—The Advance to Amara—The proposal to advance to Nasiriyeh—Views expressed by the General Staff in India and by the Commander-in-Chief—The operations on the Euphrates in July—The capture of Nasiriyeh—The distribution of the II Indian Army Corps in August—The general situation in India and the Middle East—The strategical situation in Mesopotamia—General Nixon's proposal to advance to Kut—The capture of Kut. 28

CHAPTER V.

The situation in the Near and Middle East at the capture of Kut—The strategical situation in Mesopotamia—General Nixon's proposal to advance to Baghdad, and the discussion which preceded the decision of the Cabinet on this point—The responsibility for the decision—The strategical situation in Mesopotamia immediately before the advance—The battle of Ctesiphon and the retirement to Kut—The decision to stand at Kut, and its strategical result—The strategical rôle of General Townshend at Kut. 37

CHAPTER VI.

The general situation in Mesopotamia in December, 1915—The conclusions of the War Committee—British policy after the anticipated relief of Kut—The first phase in the attempt at relief; the battles of Sheikh Saad, the Wadi and el Hanneh—The second phase; the operations on the right bank; the battle of the Dujailah—The third phase; The capture of the Hanneh and Fallahiyeh positions; the succession of the failures at Sannaiyat; Bait Issa; the "Julnar"—The surrender of Kut—Reflections on the relief operations. 56

CHAPTER VII.

The political and strategical situation at the surrender of Kut—The definition of British policy regarding the campaign—The strategical rôle of the Tigris Corps; withdrawal or not?—Factors affecting the strategical situation—C.I.G.S.'s instructions to General Lake—The situation on the Tigris in May—The situation on the Persian front and its effect on British Policy—The situation on the Tigris and on the Euphrates in June—The administrative problem—Proposals to resume the offensive—The administrative reorganisation—The change in command: General Maude appointed G.O.C.—The situation in Mesopotamia in September—The modification of the War Committee's defensive policy—Courses of action open to General Maude—The situation on the Tigris in September and October. 71

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BRITISH OFFENSIVE ON THE TIGRIS.

Final preparations for the offensive—The first phase: The line of the Hai gained and consolidated; General Maude's redistribution of his forces in order to form a mobile striking force: The operation at the Shumran Bend; The situation at the close of the first phase—Courses of action open to General Maude—The second phase: The attack on the Kadairi position by the 1st Corps meets with unexpectedly strong resistance; The action of the 3rd Corps; The situation at the end of the second phase—The third phase: operations at the Hai Salient—The fourth phase: operations at the Dahra Bend—The Turks lose the whole of the right bank of the Tigris. 90

CHAPTER IX.

THE OFFENSIVE ON THE TIGRIS—(*continued*).

The situation in the Caucasus and in north-west Persia in January, 1917, and its effect on the Tigris Front—The possible developments in British policy—The situation on the Tigris after the battle at Dahra Bend—General Maude's plan—the assault at Sannaiyat on the 17th—Preparations for crossing the Tigris—General Maude's orders for the operations on the 23rd February—The crossing at Shumran and the final assault at Sannaiyat—The Turkish retreat—The "break out" from the Shumran Peninsula—The pursuit—Administrative arrangements cause a halt at Aziziyeh—Comments on the operations between the 12th December, 1916, and the 28th February, 1917. 102

CHAPTER X.

THE CAPTURE OF BAGHDAD AND THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE POSITION THERE.

The halt at Aziziyeh—General Maude is informed that he is to exploit his success—Baghdad becomes the objective of the campaign—Russian co-operation—The advance—Fighting at the Diyala and on the right bank of the Tigris—The capture of Baghdad—Measures for consolidating the position—The Russian failure—Operations in March and April—Turkish project for a counter-offensive in the Autumn—The situation in Mesopotamia in the summer of 1917—The situation in Mesopotamia in the autumn of 1917—The operations at Ramadi in September—The offensive in Palestine diverts Turkish reserves from Baghdad—The death of General Maude—The courses open to General Marshall, his successor—Local offensives carried out in the spring and early summer of 1918—The situation in the Caucasus—"Dunster force"—The Turkish advance from Tabriz—The renewal of General Allenby's offensive in Palestine, and its effect in Persia—General Marshall's advance on the Tigris—The defeat of the remnants of the Turkish Sixth Army—The declaration of an armistice with Turkey—British troops enter Mosul—The end of the Campaign. 115

CHAPTER XI.

REFLECTIONS ON THE CAMPAIGN. 128

APPENDICES.

MAPS (*in pocket*).

No. 1.—The Middle East.
No. 2.—Mesopotamia and Western Persia.
No. 3.—River Tigris, between Sheikh Saad and Shumran.
No. 4.—Operations on the Tigris, December, 1916, to February, 1917.

BIBLIOGRAPHY.

OFFICIAL PUBLICATIONS.

East India Paper No. 8074. 1915.
Naval and Military Despatches. Parts V-X.
Report of the Mesopotamia Commission. 1917.
History of the War in Mesopotamia. Vols. I, II and III.

UNOFFICIAL PUBLICATIONS.

"Mesopotamia." 1914-15. - - H. Birch-Reynardson.
"The Long Road to Baghdad." E. Candler.
"My Campaign in Mesopotamia." - Major-General Townshend.
"In Kut and Captivity." - - - Major Sandes.
"The Operations of the 18th Indian Division in Mesopotamia."
"With the M. T. in Mesopotamia." - Colonel Leyland.
"The Adventures of Dunsterforce." - Major-General Dunsterville.
"A Chapter of Misfortunes." - - Major-General W. D. Bird.

"The Passage of the Tigris at Shumran."
"The Advance on Mosul, October, 1918."
"The Strategy of the Campaign in Mesopotamia.
"Policy and Strategy."
} Articles in the Journal of The Royal United Services Institution, 1922-1924.

PREFATORY NOTE.

This little book does not pretend to be more than an epitome of the subject with which it deals. In writing it, my sole object has been to produce a clear outline-picture of the campaign, an outline which will help the reader to a more detailed study.

It is intended to lead up to, and not to supplant, the extremely valuable and comprehensive volumes of the Official History by setting down, in condensed form, the essential facts which governed the policy, strategy and—to a very limited extent—the conduct of tactical operations in and connected with the campaign.

To attempt to deal with even an outline of four years of war in a volume of 135 pages, is to lay oneself open to severe criticism upon both matter and manner. My only excuse for the presentation of such an inadequate work is my desire to make easy for those who are unacquainted with this campaign the study of what is, in my opinion, one of the most interesting "side shows" of the Great War.

R. E.

Staff College, Camberley.
September, 1926.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/briefoutlineofca0000majo

CHAPTER I.

Mesopotamia: A brief sketch of its history in relation to the Eastern Policy of Great Britain; of its geographical and climatic characteristics; and of certain other factors which affected the problem of taking military action there.

In Lower Mesopotamia, six or seven thousand years before Christ, the temples and villages of Sumeria—the first evidence of a social organisation among men—began to arise on the banks of the Euphrates and the Tigris: it was in Mesopotamia, and in Persia, and Armenia that this primitive social organisation expanded and developed into the first conception of Empire; it was in the Middle East that the conquests of Babylonia, of Darius, of Alexander, of Rome and of Islam made history. At the beginning of the thirteenth century, after a long history of conquest and counter conquest, Mesopotamia was a fertile, flourishing and civilised country; then came the Mongol invasion, when the savage hordes of Jenghis Khan—and, later, Hulaku Khan—poured down out of the north upon Persia and Armenia, sweeping everything before them by the bitterness and violence of their animosity against Islam. In 1258 A.D. the invaders reached Baghdad. The capital was sacked, and the scientific, literary, and artistic records of centuries were wiped out; the system of irrigation, upon which the country depended for its existence, was destroyed; and, after a period of civilisation which had lasted for eighty centuries, Mesopotamia once more lay waste—an arid desert save for the two great rivers which wound their way, past a few scattered vestiges of humanity, towards the Persian Gulf. It was not until four hundred years later, when the Ottoman Turks occupied Baghdad in 1638, that the country began to revive. At this time the traders of the West were endeavouring to exploit the commercial possibilities of the East, and the trade routes into Persia from the south and west ran through Baghdad. In these endeavours British commerce was largely concerned —so largely, in fact, that in the eighteenth century England undertook responsibility for the protection of shipping from the pirates which then infested the Persian Gulf and the Shatt-al-Arab.

At this time, English foreign policy began to concern itself more and more with Eastern affairs; and as English interests in India increased, so did the importance of the Middle East became heightened—so much so, that, early in the nineteenth century, we find the possibilities of an overland route to India via Mesopotamia and Persia being considered; and, in 1834, a special reconnaissance of the Euphrates valley being made by the Chesney expedition to report upon them. However, ultimately M. de Lesseps' project for constructing the Suez Canal relegated to the background the proposition of an overland route.

By the middle of the nineteenth century the Middle East had begun to assume political, as well as commercial, importance to British Statesmen, who had considerable apprehensions over Russia's very natural desire to obtain a warm-water port, which, it was thought might well cause her to seek to acquire territory on the shores of either the Dardanelles or the Persian Gulf, and thus to achieve a strategically advantageous position with regard to British communications with the East. Alarmed for the security of India by the prospect, the British Government of the day felt impelled to adopt a policy of supporting Turkey against Russia and of seeking firmly to establish British influence in Baghdad and in Persia as a "set-off" to Russian ambitions in the Middle East and South West Asia.

Consequently, in the Russo-Turkish War of 1878, the Turks had the support of our foreign policy and of our popular sympathy. For a time, British prestige stood high in Constantinople and in Baghdad, but the peculiarly cynical diplomatic coup by which the British Foreign Minister secured the cession of Cyprus to Great Britain in return for a pledge to Turkey, which he knew he would never be called upon to redeem, caused Turkish gratitude to falter. Gradually, too, other factors—such as jealousy of our commercial interests in Mesopotamia, and resentment of our occupation of Egypt in 1882—brought about a distinctly anti-British attitude in Turkish foreign policy.

Meanwhile, the German Empire was beginning to compete with British interests in the Middle East, and, naturally, at once seized the opportunity to "cut out" Great Britain. Consequently we find, during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, every effort being made by Germany—and being made very successfully—to increase her prestige at Constantinople, at least in proportion to the decline of British influence there.

At the beginning of the twentieth century there occurred two events which had an important bearing on the political situation in the Middle East. The first was the "convention" between Germany and Turkey (to the almost total exclusion of French and British commercial interests) for the construction of the Constantinople-Baghdad railway; the second was the discovery of oil in Southern Persia, in the neighbourhood of Shustar, by the late Mr. W. K. D'Arcy, who obtained concessions from the Persian Government for five hundred thousand square miles of territory there and, helped by Lord Fisher (who was then First Sea Lord at the Admiralty) formed, in 1909, the Anglo-Persian Oil Company—an all-British Company. A few years later, the then First Lord (Mr. Winston Churchill), after a special Commission of Enquiry had examined the prospects of the company, acquired a controlling interest for the British Government by purchasing £2,200,000 worth of Ordinary Shares. It is interesting to note that this transaction was not put forward for the sanction of Parliament until *after* the purchase of the shares had been made, a fact which has a parallel in the action of Disraeli in 1875, when he, as Foreign Minister, bought on his own responsibility £4,000,000 worth of Suez Canal shares from the Khedive of Egypt. Both actions were chiefly due to personal initiative on the part of Ministers of the Crown; both had very far-reaching strategical effects.

The general result of the Baghdad railway convention—which appeared to be aimed directly against Great Britain's position in the Middle East, and therefore to form a menace to India—and the British monopoly of the Persian oil fields was still further to prejudice Anglo-Turkish political relations, and to drive Turkey more and more to look to Berlin for support. In 1908, when Enver Pasha and the "Young Turks" overthrew the then-existing regime in Turkey and set up the "Committee of Union and Progress" under German auspices, Turkish policy became markedly anti-British and aimed at the destruction of British prestige in Mohammedan eyes. In this, the chief agency which Turko-German policy sought to use was a "religious" one—that is, the hatred of Islam for Christianity—because about this time there had arisen two important politico-religious movements which were stirring the Middle East profoundly. These movements were "Pan-Islamism" and "Pan-Turanianism." Although the two were mutually antagonistic in principle—the first being inspired by religious

aspirations, and the second by racial ambitions—the C.U.P. cleverly managed simultaneously to exploit them with some effect—Pan-Islamism in Persia, Afghanistan and India; Pan-Turanianism in Turkey and Central Asia.

To ensure the security of India and her communications with England has been the basic aim of our Eastern policy ever since Great Britain added India to her Empire. As ruler of India, as chief owner of the Suez Canal, as Controller of the Anglo-Persian oilfields, Great Britain was (in 1908 just as in 1926) vitally interested in the affairs of the Mohammedan world, and here, in the Middle East—a focal point of interest—Turko-German policy was straining to bring about a coalition between the Mohammedan countries of Turkey, Persia, Arabia and Afghanistan, a coalition based on anti-Christian, anti-British doctrine.

However, in the area about the head of the Persian Gulf, British prestige and interests had a firm foundation. The Anglo-Persian Oil Company had run a pipe-line through the territory of the Sheikh of Mohammera from Shustar to the island of Abadan, and with this semi-independent ruler, the paramount sheikh in Southern Arabistan, who for years had bitterly resented and resisted Turkish aggression, had contracted definite mutual obligations for the protection of the pipe-line. Similar obligations had been concluded with the Bakhtiari Khans, the chiefs of a group of tribes in the oilfields area; the Sheikh of Koweit, an independent ruler of a territory on the south shores of the Persian Gulf, definitely looked to Great Britain to support his independence against Turkish claims; Ibn Sa'ud, Emir of Nejd, the most powerful chief in Arabia, was violently anti-Turk and was in very friendly relationship with the Government of India; in Persia, too, British prestige stood high. Persia, a close neighbour to India, had for many years been in fairly cordial relations with Great Britain, and there seemed little reason why she should ever form a coalition with Turkey, with whom she had been in constant disagreement and discordance politically, and from whom she differed on an important point of religious belief—the difference between the Shiah and Sunni Mohammedan. On the other hand, when, in 1907, Great Britain entered upon the Anglo-Russian agreement, Persia felt that an alliance had been made with her hereditary enemy Russia, and this was a feeling which Germany—herself inclined to proclaim a grievance over the agreement—lost no opportunity to exploit. In spite of this, however, in the years between 1908 and 1914

there did appear to be a strong bloc of pro-British feeling in the Middle East which, as a " set-off " against Turko-German propaganda was of distinct value to British Eastern policy, and this policy, in turn, aimed at maintaining that feeling—deeming it to contribute considerably to the security of India itself.

Whether the importance of the political situation in the Middle East was over-appreciated, it is unnecessary to enquire; the fact remains, that to maintain British prestige at the head of the Persian Gulf and in Persia was a leading principle in British policy in the Middle East in the years immediately preceding 1914, while strategically, the chief interest of Great Britain in Persia and in Mesopotamia lay in the Anglo-Persian Oil Company's wells at Shustar; the hundred and forty miles of pipe-line which connected them with the refineries, and the refineries themselves, on the island of Abadan, at the mouth of the Shatt-al-Arab.

From the Turko-German point of view, Mesopotamia was of strategic interest, because so long as Great Britain had command of the sea it was only by land that India could be approached from Europe. Mesopotamia forms a corridor of approach to south-west Asia, an approach which is immune from attack from the sea; from Turkish territory routes run through Baghdad and Qasr-i-Shirin, which outflank the Caucasus and lead through north-east Persia into Afghanistan. Its capital, Baghdad, therefore formed an effective centre from which propagandist missions could be despatched into Persia and Afghanistan—countries which were peculiarly liable violently to react to the stimulus of religious fanaticism.

From the German point of view, the importance of Great Britain's political and strategical interests in Mesopotamia must have been sufficiently obvious to encourage German policy to aim at playing upon the fears of India, and—at the cost of a comparatively small expenditure of man-power and resources to herself (the brunt of the burden being borne by her Ally)—to force us to make a strategic detachment in the Middle East to the prejudice of our effort in the main theatre of war.

Bearing in mind the main points of this very sketchy outline of the political and strategical situations, we can summarise British policy in the Middle East generally as being to ensure the security of India, Egypt and the Suez Canal; while in Mesopotamia and in Persia it aimed at retaining the allegiance of our Mohammedan friends as a

"set-off" to Turko-German attempts to produce an anti-Christian reaction; at increasing our commercial interests; and at politically consolidating our strategical position at the head of the Persian Gulf, a position which safeguarded the oil supply, blocked approach by land towards India, and denied Basra to the submarines of a possible enemy. The policy in itself was definite; the responsibility for giving effect to it was divided. The Foreign Office dealt with Turkish and Persian affairs, and the Government of India dealt with the affairs of the Persian Gulf Littoral. Similarly, the responsibility for military intelligence in the Middle East was divided between the General Staff at the War Office and the General Staff at Army Headquarters in India. To acquire accurate and comprehensive information about all likely theatres of war is one of the most important functions of a General Staff in peace time, but it is doubtful whether, before 1914, this importance was fully realised—that is, as far as concerned the Middle East. To be of real value, information must be exact; it must be comprehensive; above all, the intelligence coming from various sources must be collated, and the deductions drawn from it must be co-ordinated with information arriving through political and commercial channels. It is easy to realise that divided responsibility for collecting and collating intelligence in an area largely increases the difficulty of effective co-ordination—and this difficulty appears to have occurred over Middle Eastern intelligence which, considering the opportunities afforded us by our intimate association with the area, was neither exact nor comprehensive.

The physical and climatic characteristics of Mesopotamia were, of course, comprehended in a general way. But it was not until a considerable military force had been thrust out into the country that we appreciated the truth of the Arab proverb:— "When Allah had made Hell he found it "was not bad enough. So he made Iraq—and added flies."

Iraq as far as concerned us before the war—that is, the area lying between Baghdad, Southern Arabistan, and the head of the Persian Gulf, and the river Euphrates —is one flat plain of alluvial clay. It is unrelieved by hills, or by a single eminence of any importance. Baghdad, five hundred miles from the Persian Gulf, is little more than a hundred feet above sea level; between the capital and the sea lies a vast area of featureless desert, of which the monotony is broken only by the great rivers, and

the marshes into which they "spill" when they are flooded by the melting snows at their far-off mountain sources. If we except the palm groves which straggle here and there along the banks of the rivers, this inhospitable plain is treeless; stoneless, and—away from the rivers—waterless. When dry, the surface of the land is passable by all arms, excepting where deep irigation channels hinder the passage of wheels; but a few hours of rain turn it into a quagmire of greasy mud through which only small parties of infantry can flounder—and that with difficulty. In the flood season, huge areas of desert are converted into stretches of open water or into impassable morasses. South of the line Kut-Kufa flooded rivers are apt to rise above the level of the surrounding country, so that, to prevent wholesale inundation, great earthworks, or "bunds" (which are very liable to damage) are built at the sides of their courses to hold in their swollen waters.

In its climate, Iraq is scarcely more inviting than in landscape. It is pre-eminently a country of extremes. Between May and October the heat is intense—rising to as much as 134° Fah. *shade* temperature. Away from the sea the heat is dry, but south of Amara the climate is damp, sticky and unhealthy. Between November and April, the weather is cool, and in the months December to March it can be decidedly cold. The change from six months of intense heat to the days of the winter, when a biting wind drives a cold rain across the desert, is very great—and it was felt with particular severity by Indian troops. November and the middle of December are probably the best months of the year, because, unlike the remainder of the cool season, they are not liable to violent storms of wind and cold rain. After even quite a few hours of rain the whole country becomes a sea of glutinous mud which makes movement of troops almost impossible. In extreme heat, aeroplanes could not fly between the hours of about 9.0 a.m. and 5.0 p.m. on account of the difficulty of climbing through the layer of rarified air which was super-heated by radiation from the ground; in wet weather, pilots could not always rely on taking off from the mud.

Of all the characteristic features of Mesopotamia, perhaps "mirage" was the most remarkable. In the open desert, troops would appear to advance, to recede, to become invisible; a small bush would turn into a platoon of infantry; a few sheep would become a squadron of camelry; at a distance of a thousand yards quite large bodies of troops

might be invisible, while at three or four hundred yards it was not always possible to distinguish objects, or even to be sure if an object existed. Whatever its form, mirage was a most disconcerting accompaniment to military operations, because it interfered with reconnaissance, with observation of fire and with visual signalling.

From a health standpoint, Iraq had little to recommend it. Apart from the very trying climatic conditions, health was threatened by disease: plague, smallpox, malaria, sandfly fever, dysentery, and Baghdad boils (this last a most dispiriting and undecorative affliction) were endemic; cholera, typhus, scurvy, and heat-stroke were epidemic. Sickness was spread by the insects—mosquitoes, sandflies and (until the hot weather killed them) incredible numbers of flies.

The one and only port of Iraq was Basra "the Key to Mesopotamia." Previous to the war, Basra possessed not one of the essential qualifications to fit it for use as a base port for a military expedition. It had no quays, harbour works, nor facilities for disembarking troops, guns and stores, nor assembly places for them when they were on shore. Shipping (which was restricted to vessels drawing not more than sixteen feet), had to be unloaded in mid-stream into a swarm of small native craft—which then dispersed itself among the net-work of small channels which lay between the swamps and palmgroves. In the town itself, labour was scarce, the climate was bad, and sanitary conditions were deplorable. Between Basra and the interior the main arteries of communication were:—The Shatt-al-Arab—formed by the confluence of the Tigris and the Euphrates and navigable as far as Nahr Umbar by vessels up to twenty feet draught; the Tigris; the Euphrates, and, to a less extent, the Karun. By the Tigris, Baghdad could be reached by steamer, but at all times of the year navigation was apt to be difficult. The channel is liable to frequent alteration by the floods in May and June, and by the perpetually shifting sandbanks; during floods, a very sudden rise of water and very strong currents are apt to occur. In the flood season, vessels drawing five feet of water could reach Baghdad, but in the dry season navigation was limited to vessels of three feet draught. The journey took any time from five days onwards. The Euphrates, on account of the extreme shallowness of its channel through the Hammar Lake, had little utility as a main line of communication. The Karun was navigable along a narrow, tortuous channel only

by vessels drawing two feet of water (five feet in the flood season.

To these waterways, land routes were entirely subordinate—so much so, that from a military standpoint there was no Mesopotamia away from the rivers. Excepting the small portion (about fifty miles) of the Baghdad railway, which had been constructed between Baghdad (five hundred miles from Basra) and Samarra, and a narrow-gauge line connecting Baghdad with the Euphrates at Falujah, there were no railways in the country. Such "roads" as existed were mere tracks for pack transport, which wandered over the desert, interrupted here and there by deep irrigation cuts. After rain had fallen they were quite impassable for any wheeled transport excepting light vehicles in small numbers.

Naturally, where roads do not exist, wheeled vehicles are scarce. In Iraq even pack transport was not very plentiful. It might be expected, as a corollary, that river transport would be abundant, but the expectation was not justified. Two small steamers and a very varied collection of small native craft—sailing craft called "mahellas" and row-boats called "bellums"—were all that was available, and there were no facilities in the country for construction, or even for the repair of steamers or their machinery.

The chief products of Mesopotamia were dates, rice, barley, wheat, wool, sheep and cattle. These make an imposing list of local resources, but the deficiency of transport, the absence of roads, and the uncertain friendliness of the Arabs made the collection of supplies a matter of considerable difficulty. Neither firewood for cooking purposes nor material for road-mending existed in the country, and this greatly complicated the problem of maintaining troops beyond the base.

The population of Iraq, before the war, was approximately two-and-a-half millions—thinly-scattered over an area of about a hundred and eighty thousand square miles of desert, river, and oasis. Out of this total some two millions were Mohammedans, of whom about a million and a quarter were Arabs, the remainder consisting of Turks, Persians and Kurds. The non Mohammedan element consisted of Christians (Syrian, Armenian, and Chaldean), Jews, and a few Yezidis, or devil worshippers. Therefore, the feeling displayed by the Arab—the dominant race—towards the stranger within his gates was of considerable importance. Had the various tribes and clans been able to unite in common policy, their attitude would have been a decisive factor in the

local political situation. As it was, differences of religious dogma, and conflict between tribal interests and pursuits were so accute as to prevent any unity of policy. About one-half of the Arab population consisted of settled cultivators and town dwellers; the remainder could be classed as Nomads (who wander about Upper Mesopotamia, the Western Desert, and Arabistan, the movements of the various tent-dwelling tribes being governed by the incidence of pasturage and water) and Semi-Nomads. Turkish Administration in Mesopotamia sought to govern the Arabs by fostering inter-tribal jealousies and by playing-off one tribe against another, and there was very little effort to enforce any law and order other than those concerned with the collection of taxes. The Mesopotamian Arab generally is quick and intelligent, but he is idle and uncreative, and is swayed by the impulse of the moment rather than sustained by any constant motive; consequently he lacks power to co-operate with his fellows, either politically or militarily, and is given to sudden and violent intrigue. By nature a skilled thief, treacherous and clever, used to perpetual inter-tribal warfare and a life of plunder, the Arab possessed capabilities of forming a dangerous opponent in guerilla warfare. As matters turned out, it was found that Arab action against organised troops was almost entirely confined to harrassing rear guards, raiding supply dumps, and stripping the wounded, and their general policy was to throw in their lot with the victor of the moment. From a military standpoint, therefore, the Arab was a grave nuisance rather than a serious menace; but it was not until he had been tested by months of warfare that this fact emerged; before this, far too high an estimate was placed upon his political and military capabilities.

The essentials of the policy of Great Britain in peace towards Mesopotamia have been briefly outlined. How was this policy to be sustained in war?

Militarily, Mesopotamia came within the sphere of responsibility of the Government of India—a sphere which included the North West Frontier, in itself a military problem upon which thought was focussed to the inevitable exclusion of more remote and comparatively unlikely theatres of operations. The shortcomings of the system of Army organisation in India that were displayed in the Great War have been the subject of peculiarly bitter criticism. It must be admitted at once that, for some years prior to 1914, military expenditure in India had been so far reduced as to reach

almost starvation limit, with the result that in organisation and equipment the Army in India was twenty years behind the times. In peace, there is a perpetual conflict between the requirements of the fighting Services and the demands of financial economy, and in India the conflict has always been peculiarly acute. India is a poor country; its revenue is all too scanty to provide the money required for necessary social, administrative, and educational measures, and, in these circumstances, it was only natural that her Government should take the opportunity to "economise" whenever possible. Nevertheless, when, in 1904, the Commander in Chief, Lord Kitchener, insisted upon certain essential military reforms in India, he succeeded in getting his programme accepted—in view of a definite contingency which then appeared probable, namely an invasion of the North West Frontier by Russia. In 1907, when his projected re-organisation was only partly completed, the conclusion of the Anglo-Russian Agreement * entirely altered the political and military situations. With the Russian menace gone, and with Afghanistan friendly—as she then was—the military horizon in India seemed clear. By leaving Lord Kitchener's programme unfinished, by relinquishing the projects for an increase in establishments and for the provision of up-to-date equipment, it seemed possible to save money without incurring dangerous risks, since the Army as it stood was capable of carrying out its rôle of enforcing order among unorganised tribesmen on the Frontier. The possibility of India's taking part in a Great War beyond her own shores did not enter into the calculations of the Imperial Government, and it was not until 1912, three years after the creation of an Imperial General Staff, that the extent to which the Army in India was fitted to co-operate overseas with other Imperial Forces was made the subject of enquiry. Still later, a Special Committee was appointed to examine military conditions in India, and after many delays, arrived at the opinion that the Army in India should be made "capable of affording ready overseas co-operation." This opinion, in which the Imperial General Staff concurred, was recorded not long before the outbreak of war.

On account of the straitened financial resources of the Army, the severest economy in military expenditure and a policy of makeshift had become accepted military traditions

* It was the Anglo-Russian Agreement which somewhat prejudiced our political position vis à vis Persia.

in India. How firmly these traditions became established is well illustrated by the attitude of the Finance Member of the Viceroy's Council, who, in 1915, in introducing the Financial Statement for the year 1915-16—eight months *after* the outbreak of war—said, "Our chief economy "occurs under the Military Services ..." and proceeded forthwith to budget for half-a-million pounds less for the Army than he had asked for in the previous year. Confusion of thought is apt to arise over the word "economy" —of which the true meaning is expenditure to the best advantage. In India "economy" produced an Army which was not properly equipped for modern war, even as the term was understood in 1914, and resulted in "under-insurance," which for some years remained unattended by disaster, but which led the Army in India to take the field deficient of reserves of artillery, small arms and materials for their manufacture; of clothing, boots and equipment; of modern machine-gun and signalling equipment; of wire-cutters grenades and flares. (In these respects, indeed, the Turks, under German organisation, were better equipped than ourselves).

The Army Medical Service was neither adequate nor efficient; there were not sufficient British reinforcements in India; motor transport, either for Medical or maintenance purposes, was practically non-existent. The standard type of transport-vehicle was the "A.T. Cart," a two-wheeled, springless vehicle drawn by two mules at an "official" rate of progress of two-and-a-half miles an hour, and even Cavalry—the *mobile* troops—were unprovided with any faster-moving transport for their second line. None of these deficiencies could be quickly remedied because India was entirely dependent upon Great Britain for the supply of British personnel and war material.

In tactical training the Army lacked uniformity, administrative training was practically non-existent. On the North West Frontier and generally in the north of India, the standard of training was high and units were most efficient; in the peaceful south, matters were less satisfactory. The immense distances which separated headquarters of formations, the wide dispersion of subordinate formations and of their units, and the adherence to a semi-territorial distribution of regiments (caused by widely-varying characteristics of the personnel drawn from different districts) made it difficult to ensure the inculcation and practice of a common doctrine. Between the Imperial General Staff at the War Office

and the General Staff at Army Headquarters in India there was not a very effective liaison, and the results of modern teaching at home were slow to find their way to the East. Staff-work, particularly that of the Administrative branch, was hindered by endless and minute regulations regarding expenditure, and—a most important point—the Staff was not preparing for the participation of the armed forces of India in any large-scale military operation overseas.

From this very general outline of Great Britain's political and strategical interests in the Middle East, of the characteristics of the possible theatre of operations and of the condition of the Army in India, it is obvious that on the part of the Indian Government only a very strictly limited military enterprise in Mesopotamia could have been contemplated. Policy and strategy required only the consolidation of our position at the head of the Persian Gulf; beyond that, any military operations were liable to be severely hindered—in the winter by rain and mud, in the spring by floods, in the summer by heat and sickness, in the autumn by exhaustion following upon the summer, at all times by the extreme difficulty of maintaining an Army in a country which has neither communications nor local resources; moreover the Army in India was not organised, equipped, or maintained on a scale which suited it for service overseas, or for carrying out extended and mobile operations.

This then was the general political and military situation which confronted the Government of India when, on August 3rd, 1914, there emerged from the mass of rumour revolving round the attitude of Turkey, the definite fact that mobilisation of the Turkish Army had been ordered.

CHAPTER II.

Events in the Middle East prior to the rupture with Turkey—The conflicting claims of general and local policy—The first step towards British action in Mesopotamia—The British Plan—Events up to the capture of Basra.

During the first few weeks following upon the declaration of war with Germany, the Government of India and the Staff at Army Headquarters were anxiously arranging for the despatch of more than half the field army from India to Europe—a commitment which until then had seemed only vaguely possible. Meanwhile, the attitude of Turkey became more definitely pro-German and, by the middle of August, grew so hostile that it appeared to the Government of India to call for precautionary measures in the Persian Gulf to ensure the safety of the oil refineries at Abadan, which could easily be reached by Turkish troops from Basra. Already, between the Foreign Office, the Admiralty, and the India Office exchanges of opinion on this subject were taking place, and from the Admiralty—concerned over the oil supply—there came a suggestion that a military force should be assembled in India, at Karachi, for transference to some position of readiness within forty-eight hours steaming from the Shatt-al-Arab. However, it was not certain then that hostilities with Turkey were inevitable, and in view of the importance attached to reassuring Mohammedan popular feeling in India and elsewhere, it was thought to be most important that Great Britain should avoid any precipitate action which might be represented as forcing war upon Turkey—a Mohammedan power. The problem was considered by the Cabinet, but before any definition of policy could be made the situation in Mesopotamia became considerably graver—so much so that, by the end of August, the Government of India and the Admiralty reiterated their recommendations for taking action in the Persian Gulf, the Viceroy desiring to forestall Turkish political intrigue by this means, and the Admiralty desiring to secure the protection of the oil refineries at Abadan. Here, then, was a conflict between general policy which, aiming at the conservation of the sympathy of Mohammedan opinion as a whole, was framed to avoid taking the first step against Turkey, and local policy which urged, both on poli-

tical and strategical grounds, immediate action to consolidate our political position at the head of the Persian Gulf. For the moment, no definite decision was taken by the Cabinet, but the situation was kept under constant review. Meanwhile, war with Turkey began to appear inevitable, Turkish troops and guns arrived in Basra, and reports of Turkish efforts to seduce the pro-British Sheikhs from their allegiance began to reach India.

At the India Office, the Department of State which is responsible to the Government for the execution of its general policy with regard to India, the situation was regarded without alarm. The Military Secretary expressed little anxiety over the contingency of war with Turkey so long as it did not develop into a "jihad," or religious war of Mohammedan against Christian, in which case, he feared, serious unrest was likely to occur among Mohammedans in India, and in Egypt. Political opinion at the India Office confidently expressed the view that a "jihad" could be averted by preventing a Turko-Arab coalition—an object which, it was thought, could be achieved by giving pro-British Arabs a plain sign that Great Britain would support them against Turkish threats or inducements. In his appreciation of the situation at this time, the Military Secretary at the India Office opined that if this sign were to be effective it must be given at once, without waiting for hostilities to open; therefore, he recommended secretly sending a force to the Shatt-al-Arab with instructions to land on soil leased from Persia, ostensibly for the strategical reason of protecting the oilworks from tribal sabotage, but really for the political value attaching to a demonstration of British readiness.

What would have happened had this course been taken is a matter for surmise; that war with Turkey would have been averted, or that the subsequent course of events would have been altered, is most unlikely. The appreciation of the situation was read by the Secretaries of State for India and for War, and the Cabinet so far concurred with the views of the India Office that on September 26th a cable was sent to the Viceroy warning him that a military demonstration at the head of the Persian Gulf might become necessary. Fresh reports of attempts to detach Ibn Sa'ud and the Sheikh of Mohammerah from British allegiance, and of the despatch of Turko-German missions from Baghdad to Persia, Afghanistan, Baluchistan and the North West Frontier to preach a "jihad," to prophesy the coming of the Turks, and to convince the Mohammedan world of the

invincibility of Germany, began to arrive, and the political situation in the Middle East and the strategical position *vis à vis* the Anglo-Persian Oilfields came to appear so critical that, on October 2nd, the Cabinet decided that precautionary measures to deal with it must be taken. Consequently, instructions were sent to the Viceroy to despatch a military expedition to the Shatt-al-Arab. The force, which was to be known as Force "D," was to consist of one brigade of the 6th Indian Division, and was to sail from India under sealed orders with Force "A" (then in process of despatch to Europe). It had as its object the protection of the oilfields and other British interests in the Persian Gulf, and the demonstration of our intention to support our Arab allies. As Great Britain was not yet at war with Turkey, Force "D" was to disembark on the territory leased by the Persian Government to the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, and was to be prepared to act as covering force for any reinforcements which might be required for the defence of the 140 miles of pipeline connecting Shustar with Abadan. Further, it was decided that in event of war occurring with Turkey, the remainder of the 6th Indian Division was to be despatched from India to reinforce Force "D," and that the whole expedition should be under the direction of the Government of India—subject, of course, to instructions from the Cabinet through the Secretary of State for India.

It was realised that a surprise-landing would have considerably greater political and military effect than one which had been expected and prepared for; consequently, the destination of the 16th Brigade was kept as profoundly secret as anything can be secret in a country teeming with "bazaar-rumours." The Brigade mobilised as a part of Force "A" and actually sailed on 16th October from Bombay with a large convoy which was destined for Egypt. Three days out from port, sealed orders were opened and were found to direct Force "D" to proceed to Bahrein, and there to await further instructions. Bahrein, an island in the Persian Gulf, some 300 miles from the mouth of the Shatt-al-Arab, was reached without incident on the 23rd. Meanwhile, Turkey continued her warlike preparations. On 29th October matters came to a head when the Turkish cruisers "Goeben" and "Breslau" bombarded Russian ports in the Black Sea. On the 30th October the Allied Ambassadors at Constantinople demanded their passports; the 16th Brigade received orders to proceed to the Shatt-al-Arab, and the 18th Brigade of the 6th Indian Division was ordered to mobilise in India.

On the 2nd November Russia declared war on Turkey; on the 5th France and Great Britain followed suit, and the same day Force "D" (of which the details are shown in Appendix A), with a total strength of five thousand men and twelve hundred animals steamed across the bar of the Shatt-al-Arab into Turkish waters.

It has been mentioned previously that, considering the importance of Great Britain's interests in Mesopotamia, the amount of accurate information concerning the country and the enemy's forces which was available at Army Headquarters in India and at the War Office appears to have been curiously meagre. However, the Turkish Order of Battle was known more or less exactly, and it was estimated that of the regular Turkish Army there were in Mesopotamia about 10,000 men with 114 guns; and that of these not more than 8,000 rifles, 500 sabres and 58 guns were in the neighbourhood of Basra. Moreover, it appeared that, faced by the advance of her old enemy, Russia, in the Caucasus, and with a promising field of activity open to her along the Suez Canal, Turkey was unlikely to detach a large force to a theatre of operations which could be, to her, of only minor importance. The quality of her troops in Mesopotamia was not high, their maintenance was difficult, and altogether it seemed as if Force "D" would not have a very formidable task. By the time that hostilities with Turkey had begun, it was definitely decided that the protection of British interests at the head of the Persian Gulf and in the oilfields area, and "the support of the Sheikh of Mohammerah" were the objects of the British military intervention in Mesopotamia, and that in order to achieve them the occupation of Basra, "the key to Mesopotamia," was necessary. Basra, therefore, became the objective of the Expedition. To capture and consolidate this objective appeared to be too great a task for the original Force "D," and it was decided to increase the force to one Indian Division and one Regiment of Cavalry. In view of this decision, the role of the 16th Infantry Brigade became somewhat modified, and its commander, Brigadier-General Delamain, was instructed that his task was to secure the co-operation of the Sheikhs of Mohammerah and Koweit; to capture Fao, and to move up the Shatt-al-Arab to support the Sheikh of Mohammerah, and to reconnoitre routes towards Basra for the advance of the remainder of the force which was then being mobilised in India.

To these instructions, General Delamain began to give effect on the day after war was declared. On the 6th Novem-

ber, the fort at Fao, at the mouth of the Shatt-al-Arab, was captured after a short struggle; on the 8th, the 16th Infantry Brigade disembarked on Turkish soil at Sanniya, about two and a half miles above Abadan. On the 9th, the G.O.C. 6th Indian Division (Major General Barrett) together with his Headquarters Staff, the 18th Infantry Brigade and two squadrons of cavalry left India. General Barrett arrived at the Shatt-al-Arab on the 13th, and received definite orders from Army Headquarters that the objective of his force was Basra, on which he was to advance forthwith, if he felt his force was strong enough for the purpose. (It is interesting to find that the selection of Basra as the objective of the expedition was not actually sanctioned by the Cabinet until 20th November, three days after General Barrett had begun his advance). General Barrett commenced operations by inflicting a severe defeat upon a force consisting of about four thousand Turks and a thousand Arabs, with twelve guns. The absence of aeroplanes and the shortage of cavalry prevented Force "D" from keeping contact with the enemy, and from realising the completeness of the victory. Consequently, it was not until the 21st, after news that the Turks had evacuated Basra and were retiring up the Tigris had been received and confirmed, that the expedition began to move forward to its objective. On this day, an advanced detachment was embarked to move rapidly up the Shatt-al-Arab, while the remainder of the force moved by march route. The passage of the flotilla was considerably delayed by obstacles which the Turks had placed in the river, and it was not until 22nd November, at 0930 hours, that the advance detachment arrived, followed at noon by the main body.

The Turks fled; the Arabs received General Barrett and his force with enthusiasm; Basra, his objective, was in his hands after a complete and apparently decisive victory over the enemy's forces.

By the sudden and surprising appearance of British troops on the Shatt-al-Arab on the very day that war was declared, and by the rapidity with which the Turks had been overthrown, the local Mohammedans were strongly impressed. They realised that Great Britain had both the ability and the will to strike, and to strike hard, in support of her Allies. At Basra and throughout the delta of the Shatt-al-Arab the brilliancy of the exploit—which lost nothing in the telling in the bazaars—raised British prestige high. The Arabs welcomed us, and reported eagerly that all Turks south of

Baghdad were fleeing, panic-stricken, up stream; locally our political predominance seemed sufficiently assured not only to place the security of the oilfields beyond question, but also to produce a favourable impression of British strength throughout the whole Mohammedan world. The Turko-Arab coalition had been averted, the oilfields had been saved. The campaign in Mesopotamia had achieved its political and strategical objects; it seemed to have run, at the cost of a few hundred casualties, its successful course.

CHAPTER III.

Policy in Mesopotamia after the occupation of Basra—Political and strategical conditions governing the question of an advance—Baghdad the focal point of political ambition—The situation in the Middle East at the end of 1914—Preparations for the Turkish counter-offensive and German activities in South Persia necessitate increasing the size of the Expeditionary Force in Mesopotamia—The overthrow of the Turkish counter-offensive—The formation of the II Indian Army Corps—Its Commander's plans for the future.

General Barrett's instructions had been that Basra was the objective of the Expedition. On the capture of that objective he received no indication of any change in British policy in Mesopotamia; all that seemed required of him was to consolidate, politically and militarily, the position he had gained. At this point, however, symptoms of ambitious development in Middle Eastern policy began to show themselves, both at the Headquarters of the Expedition and in the political department of the Government of India. The first sign was the action taken by the political adviser to the Expedition, Colonel P. Z. Cox,* who had a very wide and particular experience of political matters in the districts about the Persian Gulf, and whose opinion carried considerable weight in political circles in India. Colonel Cox sent a private telegram to the Viceroy, a telegram in which he urged that the Expedition should make an immediate advance upon Baghdad in order to exploit the striking success that had been gained, and to increase the excellent local effect of General Barrett's operations, saying "after earnest consideration of the arguments "for and against I find it difficult to see how we can well "avoid taking over Baghdad."

This "earnest consideration" referred, presumably, to the purely *political* arguments in the case. Baghdad is approximately five hundred miles from Basra; its communications with that port were quite inadequate to meet the requirements of anything but a very small military force, lay in hostile country and were singularly difficult to protect; the focus of Turkish political and military activity, was unlikely to be "taken over" without a struggle; the resources of

* Afterwards Major-General Sir P. Z. Cox.

Mesopotamia could not greatly assist in maintaining the Expedition. It is obvious that these salient points in the military situation cannot have been given "earnest consideration," nor apparently, were they brought to the notice of the G.O.C., who approved of the despatch of the telegram as a "bait" to catch a definite expression of policy from his Government. In view of the objects of the Expedition, which had been quite clearly defined at first, it is not clear what change of policy General Barratt expected. From a military point of view, to contemplate any considerable advance with a force of one division in the circumstances in which the Expedition was placed with regard to maintenance and administration was almost impossible, and the only course dictated by sound strategy was the course which General Barrett recommended—to consolidate his position at Basra. However, Colonel Cox's opinion had considerable effect in India, where in political circles any chance to increase British prestige in Mohammedan eyes, and any opportunity to check the flow of anti-British propaganda into Persia, Afghanistan, and the North West Frontier, were hailed with enthusiasm. At the India Office, too, political opinion strongly favoured Colonel Cox's proposal, the Political Secretary going so far as to say that he regarded the step as being "so desirable as to be practically essential." In fact, no sooner was the idea of an advance to Baghdad mooted than it became an obsession in political circles, an obsession which became a permanent menace to sound strategy in the Middle East. By military opinion, both at the India Office and at Army Headquarters in India, the project was not regarded favourably, because it was felt to be entirely beyond the scope and capability of the Expedition.

At the India Office, the Military Secretary, although he admitted that a policy of passivity was to be deprecated because it would fail to impress the Arab and Indian public, gave it as his considered opinion that any thought of an immediate advance to Baghdad was premature. He suggested however, that to advance to Qurna was within the capabilities of General Barrett's force and that the step would be one which would consolidate our position at Basra, strengthen our hold on the oilfields area, and create in the mind of the enemy the idea that we were contemplating a future advance upon Baghdad.

In India, the General Staff definitely stated that an advance to Baghdad, even if it were feasible, would entail a diversion of military resources to an objective of secondary

importance, and that "however desirable politically, military "considerations indicate that even success would result in "our general strategic position being weakened rather than "strengthened. . . ."

At this time, it must be remembered, there was no proper co-ordination of effort in the various theatres of war, and the Imperial General Staff at the War Office—a Staff which had been seriously depleted by calls made for replacements of personnel in France—had no direct responsibility for the campaign in Mesopotamia; consequently it was not easy for the Cabinet to arrive at an exact appreciation of the military resources which might be wisely and economically expended in the Middle East, and the natural tendency was to wait and see how the situation developed before committing the Government of India to a definite policy. However, on 27th November the decision was taken that no advance to Baghdad was to be made, and that General Barrett should consolidate his position at Basra, moving forward to Qurna with as much of his force as he deemed to be necessary to ensure the success of the operation. From a military standpoint, the soundness of limiting the forward movement of Force "D" was incontrovertible; politically, the step completed the attainment of the object of the Expedition—the consolidation of British influence at the head of the Persian Gulf. Nevertheless, the idea of an advance to Baghdad—urged by the Political Adviser with the Force, and eagerly accepted by the Political Departments at Delhi and in the India Office—was already exercising a dangerous power of attraction upon our policy, and was beginning to dazzle military minds with visions of triumphant entry into the heart of the enemy's country.

However, for the time being General Barrett's role was restricted to an advance as far as Qurna. On 4th December, he moved forward from Basra, and by the 9th, after some fighting, which was stiff enough to show that the Turkish morale was not so shattered as he had been led to believe, and that the enemy was quite capable of putting up a stout resistance, the village of Qurna was in his hands. Shortly afterwards, General Barrett extended his left to Shaiba, to cover Basra from attack by way of the desert route from the Euphrates as well as from direct attack down the Tigris. It was proposed still further to secure the left flank by occupying Nasiriyeh, an important tribal centre on the Euphrates, but the difficulties of maintaining a detachment there were very great, and the detachment itself would have been danger-

ously isolated; therefore, the proposal, which was put forward chiefly on political grounds, was dismissed. By the end of the year, then, the enemy in Lower Mesopotamia had been decisively defeated; Turkish influence in the delta of the Shatt-al-Arab had been destroyed, and the British interests at Basra and in the oilfields area had been made secure.

Unfortunately, in the Middle East as a whole the situation was not so entirely satisfactory. Turkey, it is true, was fully occupied. In her struggle with Russia on the Caucasus front; in her attempt to concentrate troops for an attack across the Sinai Peninsula upon the Suez Canal; in the forthcoming operations in the Dardanelles campaign, she was to be very hard pressed. Elsewhere, however, matters were not going too well. In Persia, Turko-German missions from Baghdad, with the active sympathy of the Swedish Officers of the Persian Gendarmerie, were having considerable success with anti-Ally propaganda, a success which was heightened by the advance of a Turko-Kurdish force towards Tabriz, which had been evacuated by Russian Troops. In Afghanistan, the situation was being watched with interest and, although the Amir announced his intention of remaining neutral, there was a general restlessness, which was kept alive by countless rumours and skilful propaganda which trickled through from Persia. In India, there were many anxieties for the Viceroy. The larger proportion of the field army had gone overseas; two serious tribal raids had been made on the North West Frontier; the internal situation showed symptoms of unrest. In the Middle East, Mesopotamia appeared to be the one centre which could be regarded without anxiety, but even here our confidence was not to remain undisturbed for long.

Intelligence regarding the movement of Turkish troops from the Constantinople area and of their subsequent itinerary was collected by the General Staff at the War Office, whence it was circulated to the Staffs in the various theatres of war concerned, but exact information of Turkish movement was very difficult to obtain, partly because after leaving Constantinople troops could be diverted to any one of three fronts, and partly because of the mass of rumour with which the East was teeming. However, early in January, 1915, it seemed certain both from the intelligence which reached the War Office and from that which was gained by the General Staff with Force "D," that the Turks in Mesopotamia were being reinforced, and that they intended to carry out a counter-offensive either by advancing into the oilfields area in Arabistan, or by an attack upon General

Barrett's advanced position at Qurna, or—by way of the desert route—on Basra itself.* It was even possible that simultaneous action in all three directions might be contemplated, and with this contingency in mind General Barrett asked the Commander-in-Chief in India for reinforcements. Naturally enough, the Commander-in-Chief demurred at this request, as troops could ill be spared from India. While a discussion between the Government of India and the India Office regarding the despatch of these reinforcements to Mesopotamia and their replacement in India by Territorial Battalions from England was being carried on, the situation confronting General Barrett suddenly became somewhat critical. Largely owing to the arrival of a German agent, Wassmuss, at Shustar, the tribes in the oilfields area became very restless; finally in February one tribe, the Bawi, rose and cut the pipe-line which connected the oilfields with the refineries. To prevent further damage, General Barrett made a small detachment from his main force and posted it in Arabistan at Ahwaz, on the river Karun. Meanwhile, early and heavy floods had caused the Tigris and the Euphrates to rise and overflow their banks, with the result that the British position at Qurna had become converted into a small island, and its garrison, with the exception of a small post, had had to be withdrawn. At Shaiba, too, the floods had complicated the situation, by making it extremely difficult to maintain the troops by a line of communication which ran over the flooded desert. Altogether, the situation assumed such an unexpectedly unfavourable aspect that the Secretary of State for India decided that the reinforcements must be sent.

With great difficulty another Indian Division—the 12th, consisting of the 12th, 33rd, and 30th Infantry Brigades (the last-named from Egypt), but without its full complement of Divisional Artillery, Engineers and Signallers—was mobilised during March. Meanwhile, it became apparent to General Barrett that the strength of the Turkish forces was slowly increasing, and that a hostile attack was impending.

During the first week of April he learned that a Turko-Arab concentration, which he knew to be taking place opposite his left front about Nasiriyeh, and which he estimated at some twelve thousand Regular Turkish troops and ten thousand Arab Irregulars, was complete; simultaneously his outposts on the right flank, at Ahwaz, were attacked and pressed

* *Vide* **Map No. 2.**

back. As a "set-off" to this, by April 8th, the 12th Indian Division was commencing to concentrate at Basra.

On the 12th April, the expected offensive from Nasiriyeh began with the advance of the Turko-Arab Army to attack the British position at Shaiba, which was held by only two brigades of infantry, one brigade of cavalry and the Divisional troops of the 6th Indian Division. The action was fought in circumstances of considerable difficulty. The defenders were outnumbered, and the floods which covered the desert to a depth of two or three feet made the movement of troops, the supply of food and ammunition, and the evacuation of casualties very difficult; indeed for these purposes flotillas of small native craft had to be improvised and were poled, or pushed by men wading almost waist-deep over the flooded desert.

The fighting on April 12th and 13th was heavy and almost continuous; but by the 14th the impetus of the attack had waned, and, despite their exhaustion, the defenders were just able to take the counter-offensive and to attack the enemy at Barjisiyeh. The result was a decisive victory for General Barrett. Fighting had lasted for three consecutive days (during which our Infantry had lost over twenty per cent. of their strength), the heat was unusually great for the time of year, the mirage was extremely bad, ammunition was used up, and the troops were exhausted; consequently no effective pursuit could be organised. However, the Arab Irregulars turned on their defeated Allies and, harassing their retreat, completed the exploitation of a somewhat narrowly-gained victory. While the British casualties were thirteen hundred, it was estimated that the enemy's amounted to about six thousand. The Turks fled north-west towards Nasiriyeh in great confusion, with scarcely a halt till they were ninety miles from Shaiba; Sulaiman Askeri, their Commander, having denounced the faithlessness of the Arabs, committed suicide. The victory was complete. Politically, its result was to heighten British prestige, and to restore the confidence of our Arab Allies; strategically, its results were that the delta of the Shatt-al-Arab was cleared of the enemy, Basra was secured against attack by way of the desert route, and initiative was regained by the commander of Force "D."—Lieutenant-General Sir John Nixon.

On the 8th April, General Nixon had arrived from India to take over from General Barrett the command of the Expedition, which, after the arrival of the 12th Indian Division, was re-organised as the II Indian Army Corps. Before taking

up his appointment, he received instructions from the Commander-in-Chief in India to the effect that the objects of the campaign were :—

> To control the Basra Vilayet (a district of which the forward limit was a line which may be considered very approximately as the line of the River Hai) and those portions of neighbouring territory which might effect its security; to ensure the safety of the oilfields, pipe-line and refineries; and, after acquainting himself with the situation, to submit plans for the effective occupation of the Basra Vilayet, and for a future advance to Baghdad.

The formation of the II Indian Army Corps, and the appointment of General Nixon to command it, mark a distinct turning-point in the history of the campaign. General Nixon's appointment, in particular, had far-reaching consequences, and his own influence on the course of events affords an interesting example of the power which can be exercised by the personality of a commander. A cavalry soldier, a polo-player, and a pig-sticker, General Nixon had a well-earned reputation for dash, and he himself—as well as many others in India—was under the impression that he had been selected for command largely on account of this particular characteristic. Energetic, inclined to the Napoleonic in his decisions, he was a successful Army Commander in India and had got a name at manœuvres and at tactical exercises for "ginger." He was a natural leader rather than a highly-trained commander; consequently he was, perhaps, somewhat prone to regard war as an affair in which the "practical man" who was not afraid of accepting personal responsibility could achieve his end by ordinary "common-sense" untrained methods, and, confronted at every turn by administrative parsimony in military affairs, to look at it purely from the fighting point of view, leaving administration to arrange itself as economically as it could.

Now, towards the close of his service, he found himself afforded an opportunity which had come the way of few soldiers of his generation, the supreme command of what appeared likely to become an important and brilliant campaign.

General Nixon, not unnaturally, read into the instructions of the Commander-in-Chief an intended change of policy, nor was his Staff, which was to some extent improvised from inexperienced and untrained personnel, likely to be able to advise restraint to a commander whose chief character-

istics were a keen desire to push on at all costs, and to accept personal responsibility for every decision. Consequently, when, charged with the spirit of the offensive, fired by the thought of Baghdad as an objective, he arrived in Mesopotamia to find that with the victory at Barjisiyeh strategical initiative passed into his hands, he at once conceived a vigorous plan of action—a mental process with which his political adviser, always anxious to increase British prestige in the eyes of the Arabs, was in full sympathy.

Naturally, the main strategy of the campaign was dependent upon the policy communicated to the Viceroy by the Secretary of State for India; and, while General Nixon was taking stock of the local situation, the Secretary of State was also considering the scope of the campaign. His opinion was that British policy in Mesopotamia should continue to be limited to its original objects, and that strategical action should be confined to the measures necessary to defend the Basra Vilayet and to make secure the oilfields, pipe-line and refineries. To him, the situation as it then existed seemed well in hand, and, as no reinforcements were available for the Expedition, he felt that "we must play a safe game in "Mesopotamia ...." and not seek to extend the existing sphere of operations excepting, perhaps, by a purely local offensive on the Karun or up the Tigris towards Amara *if* by doing so we should be materially contributing to the security of the oil-supply. This final qualification afforded General Nixon his opportunity for urging an offensive strategy. After their decisive defeat on the Euphrates, the enemy everywhere remained supine, leaving open to General Nixon three alternative courses of action. He could follow up the remnants of the Turkish Army which, broken at Barjisiyeh, had retired to Nasiriyeh, an important tribal centre; he could attack the enemy on the Tigris and occupy Amara, thus cutting Turkish communications with Northern Arabistan and the oilfields area, and also, perhaps, giving the impression that he meant to advance on Baghdad; or he could operate in Arabistan to clear the oilfields area and to protect his own right flank against a turning movement. Of the three courses, General Nixon considered the one best calculated to stabilise the situation in the oilfields area was to advance to Amara, a centre from which trade routes radiate into Arabistan, and from which the control of the turbulent Beni Lam tribesmen might be successfully exercised. Colonel Cox, his political adviser, also favoured this course, because a forward movement was likely

to raise British prestige and to impress the Arab generally, That these reasons were in themselves sound, cannot be gainsaid; but it is to be noted that no advance could be made without increasing the dispersion of the II Corps and extending its communications. Already, the administration of the force was showing signs of strain, and the hot weather was approaching; General Nixon's difficulties were bound to increase. In these circumstances, it was open to grave question whether strategically the value of an advance to Amara was commensurate with the risk it entailed; had not Baghdad been looming ahead in the distance, it is doubtful whether a defensive role might not have been definitely imposed upon the Expedition. As it was, the Secretary of State reluctantly sanctioned the forward movement to Amara on the very urgent and persuasive recommendations of General Nixon and the Viceroy. Amara was a step towards Baghdad: there can be little doubt that the fact affected the judgment of both the political and military authorities.

General Nixon did not limit his programme to action on the Tigris alone. He planned, as a preliminary to the advance to Amara, an operation in Arabistan; as a final consolidation of his new position, the occupation of Nasiriyeh; and for this programme, he specifically assured the Secretary of State, his strength was sufficient.

When we consider that the hot weather was upon him; that his force was short of transport, tents, medical equipment and supplies; that he was about to operate in a broken desert country without adequate communications, and that without any increase in his power to maintain his force he was contemplating extending his hold to the line Ahwaz-Amara-Nasiriyeh, we must admit that General Nixon showed neither lack of enterprise nor fear of accepting responsibility.

CHAPTER IV.

The operations in Persian Arabistan in May—The advance to Amara—The proposal to advance to Nasiriyeh—Views expressed by the General Staff in India and by the Commander-in-Chief—The operations on the Euphrates in July—The capture of Nasiriyeh—The distribution of the II Indian Army Corps in August—The general situation in India and the Middle East—The strategical situation in Mesopotamia—General Nixon's proposal to advance to Kut—The capture of Kut.

General Nixon lost no time in preparing to resume the offensive. By April 21st he had concentrated at Basra two regiments of cavalry, one battery of horse artillery, two batteries of field artillery and six battalions of infantry—the whole being under the command of Brigadier-General Gorringe—for operations in Persian Arabistan. The details of this phase are given in the official history and are well-worth studying as an example of what hardships can be borne, and borne cheerfully, by well-trained, well disciplined troops. The column, operating in broken desert, in fierce, burning heat, and suffering greatly from thirst and shortage of drinking water, carried out its rôle with entire success. Having removed the menace to the oilfields by driving the enemy out of Persian Arabistan, General Gorringe continued to advance towards Amara with the object of pinning the Turks to their position there and preventing them from reinforcing their forward troops in front of Qurna, where General Nixon's main attack was shortly to be made. The phase ended on June 9th, when General Gorringe's column, very exhausted by heat and thirst, returned to Basra, having succeeded in restoring the supply of oil to Abadan and having afforded considerable assistance to the operations on the Tigris.

On the Tigris, in April, the military situation was a difficult one. The small garrison at Qurna, General Nixon's forward post, was entirely surrounded by the floods spilled over by the river, which, early in the month, was actually two feet above the level of the camp. Between the British at Qurna and the "island" positions which the Turks were occupying on a general line of slightly higher ground, stretched a vast area which was flooded to an average depth of about three feet, although where irrigation canals occurred, the water was as much as twenty feet deep. In this great lake,

grew scattered clumps of reeds, from two to five feet high, which gave a little cover from view; to conceal the movement of troops, however, was practically impossible, and therefore, surprise and manœuvre against the enemy's flank were out of the question. During the first fortnight in May the success of General Gorringe's operations in Arabistan—on the flank of the Turkish position on the Tigris—made itself felt and it was obvious that his column was preventing the enemy from moving down to strengthen the forces immediately up-stream of Qurna. General Nixon, therefore, decided on an advance to drive the enemy up the river and to occupy Amara, and ordered General Townshend, with the 6th Indian Division, to carry out the operation. General Townshend, in anticipation of the event, had for some time been organising a special force for what he knew would be an amphibious operation. His infantry was trained to manœuvre in small native boats known as "bellums," each battalion having about sixty of these craft and about two hundred men specially practised in propelling them. Covering fire for the infantry "bellum-brigade" was to be provided by the Naval Flotilla of river gun-boats and by batteries of field artillery carried on rafts, while special rafts —not unlike Noah's Arks—were constructed to carry Field Ambulances. Towards the end of May, all General Townshend's preparations were complete, and on the 31st, his force, headed by H.M. Ships "Espiègle" and "Clio" on the Tigris, moved out across seven thousand yards of flooded open desert without cover from view or fire, to attack the Turkish positions.

By nightfall, the first phase in the operations, which were nicknamed "Townshend's Regatta," had been carried out with complete success, and General Townshend was preparing to press home a decisive attack next day. Naturally, in the circumstances, effective patrolling was extremely difficult to carry out, and it was almost impossible to maintain close touch with the enemy in the dark. It was not surprising that during the night the Turks managed to withdraw from their positions and to slip away up-stream, or that it was not until early next morning when his aeroplanes (which had just now apeared in this theatre of war for the first time) reported the fact to him, that General Townshend knew anything of the movement. At once he ordered his force to concentrate and to embark for pursuit, and himself pressed on up the river on board the "Espiègle," with the Naval Flotilla following him. Though delayed by

the difficulties of the fast-running and tortuous "narrows" above Qurna, and by obstructions which the enemy had placed in the river, the river gun-boats got in touch with the Turkish retreat, and by their gun-fire and the moral effect of their rapid pursuit converted it into a rout. The Turks broke and fled up-stream.

On June 2nd, the pursuit was pressed vigorously by the Flotilla, the "Shaitan" with one officer and eight crew capturing eleven officers and two hundred and fifty men and putting to flight two thousand! The "Espiègle"—General Townshend's Headquarters—ran aground, but General Townshend, Colonel Cox, and the Senior Naval Officer transferred themselves to a light-draught ship, H.M.S. "Comet," and with four other gun-boats, reached Amara at 1330 hours on June 3rd. Here all was in helpless confusion, and not a shot was fired by the enemy, who, by now, were thoroughly demoralised. General Townshend, with a combined Naval and Military force consisting of thirty sailors and soldiers, landed and took the surrender of Amara—a town of twenty thousand inhabitants, which, together with forty offices and eight hundred men, was thus captured by one Major-General, one Naval Captain, one Political Adviser and thirty men. It was not until 1830 hours on the following day that the leading battalion of the 6th Indian Division arrived to make the position secure. The detachment of the enemy which had been contained at Bisaitin by General Gorringe's operations in Arabistan, commenced to retire towards Amara in ignorance of General Townshend's presence there, and were engaged by the 6th Division and dispersed with the loss of two guns. Thus ended "Townshend's Regatta"—an operation which demonstrated once again the value of improvisation to meet the abnormal in war.

In the short space of a month, the enemy's counter-offensive had been shattered, and the control of the oilfields area and the safety of the right flank of the force had been assured. Technically, however, General Nixon had not consolidated his position throughout the *whole* of the Basra Vilayet, and, inspired by success, to this task he now turned his attention. He proposed to advance to Nasiriyeh, on the Euphrates, but in submitting this proposal to the Commander-in-Chief in India, General Nixon pointed out that while the occupation of Nasiriyeh would help to complete the consolidation of the Basra Vilayet by securing for him the Headquarters of the old Turkish Civil Administration of the district, the occupa-

tion of Kut-el-Amara, on the Tigris was also necessary. The proposal to advance to Nasiriyeh, which was acceptable to the Commander-in-Chief himself, was not looked on favourably by the General Staff in India, although at first sight politically and strategically there were arguments which could be held to justify the step. Nasiriyeh, in addition to being a centre from which the tribes of the lower Euphrates could be controlled, had a certain strategical value. Situated at the junction of the Euphrates with the river Hai—at that time wrongly thought to be a line of communication of practical military value—it was, potentially, an advanced base for a Turkish counter-offensive against Basra by way of either the Euphrates direct, or the Tigris, Hai and Euphrates. There did exist at Nasiriyeh the remnants of the Turkish force which had rallied after the battle at Barjisiyeh—remnants which General Nixon considered might form the nucleus of an attack on his weakly-protected communications with Amara. Administratively, the situation was most unfavourable. The heat was intense—120° in the shade—the sick-rate was high; as a result of the shortage of vegetables the Indian troops were suffering badly from scurvy; milk, ice and comforts were lacking; medical arrangements were deplorable. A medical ogranisation which originally had been insufficient for the needs of one division had now been "expanded" to meet the requirements of the II Indian Army Corps, with the result that at Amara men lay dying on the ground in shelters which were scarcely sun-proof. Transport by water and by land was insufficient to maintain the widely dispersed units of the force, and the low level of water in the river in the summer made navigation difficult and slow. Although it was stated in the press at this time that everything was being done to make the troops comfortable, this "everything" amounted to very little. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that the Staff in India concluded that General Nixon would do better to keep his force concentrated on the Tigris rather than to add to his difficulties by increasing his dispersion—as he must do in advancing on the Euphrates.

However, the administrative situation does not appear to have weighed very seriously with either General Nixon or Sir Beauchamp Duff, the Commander-in-Chief, and eventually General Nixon's proposal was sanctioned.

Meanwhile General Gorringe, who had just returned from the operations in Arabistan, was busy concentrating a force for the projected operation, and his preparations were com-

pleted by the 26th June. By this time the floods on the Euphrates had subsided and the waters of the Hammar Lake had receded, but, excepting a few hundred yards of high ground on both sides of the river, practically the whole country was a swamp—everywhere intersected by deep irrigation channels.

In this narrow belt of comparatively dry ground General Gorringe's troops fought for six weary weeks, creeping forward, yard by yard, from sodden trench to sodden trench, in a shade temperature of 120°—a moist swampy heat—eaten alive with insects. In his despatch, General Nixon said "seldom, if ever, have troops been called upon to campaign "in such trying heat ..." Nevertheless, by the 25th July, Nasiriyeh was in his hands.

With the capture of Nasiriyeh, practically the whole of the Basra Vilayet now came under British control, but at the cost of a very wide dispersion of his forces. The II Indian Army Corps was disposed in five main groups:—At Basra; Ahwaz; Amara; Nasiriyeh; Qurna, and the lines of communication on the Tigris, Euphrates and Karun.

On the Euphrates, as in Arabistan and on the Tigris, the troops had risen to the occasion and had triumphed over almost inconceivably adverse circumstances. General Nixon realised that his army must have time for rest and re-organisation. Nevertheless, stimulated by success, he turned his thoughts again to an advance on Kut-el-Amara—a project the Government of India was preparing to consider favourably.

At this time, that is in August and September, the political situation in India and the Middle East was an anxious one.

In Persia, German influence was supreme at Teheran, everywhere anti-British propaganda was rife—the British Residency at Bushire had been attacked. In reply, a small force had been specially organised to restore the situation in South Persia—a force which, subsequently, was placed under General Nixon, who was informed that he was responsible for the defence of Bushire (two hundred miles behind his base), but that his attitude there was to be "strictly "defensive." To deal with the Persian situation other detachments, too, were sent from India to Seistan, in order to close the routes from Persia to Afghanistan via Meshed, Birjand, Kerman and Baluchistan; while the Russians, who had troops operating south of the Caucasus near Lake Van, about thirty marches from Baghdad, landed a force in Persia

at Enzeli, on the south shore of the Caspian Sea, and sent a column to Meshed to complete the cordon.*

In India, a more than usually determined tribal disturbance on the part of the Mohmands had alarmed the Viceroy and increased the apprehensions with which the internal situation was regarded. Finally, the failure of the Dardanelles campaign and the lack of success on the part of the Allies on the Western front seemed to give occasion for a loss of British prestige, a loss which the Viceroy feared might react unfavourably on the general situation in India and the Middle East. Consequently, intensely desirous of increasing "British prestige" by any possible means, he very strongly expressed in his private correspondence with the Secretary of State for India, the importance of an advance to Baghdad, which to him appeared to be a panacea for all political evils. Meanwhile, the General Staff in India, influenced by the comparative proximity to Baghdad of a small Russian force which had been detached from the Caucasus front and had reached Lake Van (this detachment was actually endeavouring to turn the Turkish right, south of Erzerum, and was not directed against Baghdad at all), were giving favourable consideration to General Nixon's proposal to advance to Kut. The reasons for this proposal, as set out by General Nixon, were that Kut, standing at the junction of the Tigris and its effluent, the Hai, was a possible potential advanced base for a hostile counter-offensive which might come either along the Tigris to Amara, or by way of the Hai, to Nasiriyeh, the lower Euphrates and Basra. General Nixon said this threat, must force him to keep his troops dispersed instead of concentrating them on the Tigris, as was his desire. His contention, based on strategical and political grounds, was that by occupying Kut he would be depriving the enemy of a point which was important to him both as an advanced base and as a centre from which the local resources from the cultivated areas about Shattra and the Hai could be drawn, and at the same time, be obtaining for himself a much-needed source of supply, as well as a position from which he could most effectively exercise control over the Beni Lam tribes, whose attitude was an important factor in the local political situation. General Nixon concluded by stating that he could concentrate and maintain suffcient troops on the Tigris to make certain of defeating the enemy and occupying Kut and that, after its capture, his intention

* *Vide* Map No. 1.

was to withdraw his detachment from Nasiriyeh and to remain concentrated on the Tigris, thus easing the difficulties of maintenance—which by now were pressing him somewhat heavily. Superficially, these arguments appear convincing. Actually, when it is realised that the advance entailed—if only temporarily—still further dispersion of force, and an increase of about a hundred and fifty miles in the length of his communications; that at this time the sick-casualties of the expedition were very high (for example, the 1/4th Bn. Hants were only 115 strong); that reinforcements could not be spared from India or from Home, and that there had been no perceptible increase in the amount of river-transport, it will be seen that they rested upon an unsound basis because they were framed without due regard to the administrative situation. To neither General Nixon, nor to the General Staff in India (who were still under the influence of the apprehension that the Russians would forestall the British in the occupation of Baghdad) did the overwhelming importance of the administrative factor present itself; consequently they were prepared to acquiesce in a situation in which a force, even then being maintained on an inadequate scale, was very greatly to extend its lines of communication without having the proportionate tactical or administrative resources available. At Home, the Secretary of State for India more nearly realised the dangers of the proposal and sought to instil caution into our policy, but by this time the Viceroy had made up his mind that Kut was essential to British prestige, and stated that in his opinion (and in the opinion of "the man on the spot," General Nixon) the advance was "strategically desirable and will have a quieting "effect upon Persia and the Bakhtiaris." The Secretary of State, pressed at his most vulnerable points—prestige, Persia, and the oil supply—allowed himself to be persuaded into adopting Kut as the new objective of the Expedition.

This decision marks a turning point in the policy and strategy of the campaign—a point at which a definitely limited and defensive policy gives way to half-expressed ambitions for a political *coup de main.* Originally, policy and strategy together had aimed at producing a definite result by the occupation and consolidation of a dominating position at the head of the Persian Gulf. For reasons which will appear later, we may consider that this position was acquired when the Expedition found itself in undisputed possession of the Basra Vilayet up to and including the line Ahwaz-Amara-Nasiriyeh, but now policy—seeking to acquire prestige by a

spectacular occupation of Baghdad—leaped ahead of strategy, which was left to lag behind as best it could. In an attempt to keep up with, or even to lead, policy General Nixon forced his strategy beyond the limits which should have been imposed upon him by the administrative situation. Neither in troops nor in maintenance had he any effective reserve with which effectively to meet the requirements of the policy which he was vigorously helping to instigate. Nothing succeeds like success; so far, the campaign presented to him an unbroken series of success —of success in the face of almost impossible difficulties and hardships; what he had done at Amara and at Nasiriyeh, he was prepared to do again at Kut—and finally, on the flood-tide of success, the Expedition would be carried to Baghdad.

Accordingly, on August 23rd, General Townshend, commanding the 6th Indian Division, was given instructions to effect "the destruction and dispersion of the enemy . . .and "the occupation of Kut . . ." From these and other instructions he appears to have understood that he was at liberty to follow the Turks into Baghdad, though it is not clear whether this was his commander's real intention or not. (At all events, on September 6th, General Nixon received a definite order from the Commander-in-Chief in India that he was not to operate beyond Kut without permission.)

On September 1st, General Townshend commenced his forward concentration at Ali Gharbi, and for the first time in the campaign all three brigades of his Division found themselves together. On September 19th, the 6th Division, having marched day by day in the early hours of the morning—between dawn and 0830 hours (on account of the heat, which rose to 110°-120° during the middle of the day)—reached Sanniyat, about sixteen miles below Kut.

The Turks occupied a strong position astride the river at Es Sinn, their force consisting of five or six thousand infantry, supported by twelve field guns, in well sited, and well-wired trenches, with good command of an extensive field of fire. General Townshend planned to attack this position by leading Nur ud Din, the Turkish Commander, to expect envelopment on both flanks—the tactical plan which had been so effective at Nasiriyeh—while really aiming the decisive blow against the left, which was more favourable for his purpose.

On September 27th, therefore, he opened the battle by advancing against the enemy's right on the right bank of the Tigris, and by nightfall on the 28th, the advance had

made excellent progress. That night the weather turned miserably cold, and the troops, who were much exhausted by the heat and thirst of the day, suffered great hardship. Nevertheless, during the darkness, they quietly concentrated on the right bank, crossed the river by a pontoon bridge and deployed for attack on the left bank, only to find, in the morning, that the enemy, too, had been busy during the night and, having skilfully extricated himself from his position, was retiring up-stream.

General Townshend hastily embarked a force and set off in pursuit, reaching Kut on the night of September 30th. Meanwhile, the enemy had gone straight back to Ctesiphon, eighty miles above Kut, to occupy a strong position which was already prepared there. Next day, the 6th Cavalry Brigade, which was with General Townshend, overtook the enemy's rearguard forty miles above Kut, but by this time the supply situation was so chaotic that a general halt had to be called. It was not until October 5th that the Cavalry Brigade and the River Column reached Aziziyeh, twenty-one miles further on.

The maintenance of the force had now become almost impossible; re-organisation of the administrative services was imperative. Therefore, because it could not be maintained, the pursuit was abandoned; administration, for the moment, controlled strategy.

The operations had been very successful. The Turkish casualties were about four thousand men, fourteen guns, and a quantity of stores. General Townshend's casualties were twelve hundred—of which by far the greater proportion was due to sickness. The troops, soft and unfit, after the extreme heat of Amara—which had made training difficult—suffered much in the operations and the casualties were unexpectedly heavy—just double the estimated numbers. Unfortunately, too, the inability of the inadequate medical arrangements to cope with the situation caused a great deal of unnecessary suffering to the men.

However, Kut was in the hands of General Nixon who, having once more triumphed over extreme difficulties, was begining to feel that his Army was invincible.

CHAPTER V.

The situation in the Near and Middle East at the capture of Kut—The strategical situation in Mesopotamia—General Nixon's proposal to advance to Baghdad, and the discussion which preceded the decision of the Cabinet on this point—The responsibility for the decision—The strategical situation in Mesopotamia immediately before the advance—The battle of Ctesiphon and the retirement to Kut—The decision to stand at Kut, and its strategical result—The strategical rôle of General Townshend at Kut.

The capture of Kut and General Townshend's rapid pursuit to Aziziyeh formed the preliminaries to a crisis in the political and strategical conception of the campaign—a crisis which was to bring about results that affected not only the course of the war in Mesopotamia but also the course of events wherever the Great War was being waged. In order to see the campaign in Mesopotamia in its proper perspective in relation to Imperial efforts elsewhere, it is necessary to consider in outline the essentials of the general political situation in the Middle East.

In India, the Viceroy—in constant anxiety about internal security—was looking for any military success which might serve to heighten British prestige in Asiatic eyes, and to "set off" British failures in the West where recently we had lost ground north of Ypres, and in Turkey, where the Dardanelles venture had definitely and obviously failed. In Afghanistan, a Turko-German Mission had reached Kabul, and the resultant attitude of the Amir was as yet unknown.

In Egypt, too, there were apprehensions over the Turkish preparations for a fresh offensive against the Suez Canal, and over the internal situation; consequently, at Headquarters in Cairo there was a natural desire to create a favourable diversion against Turkey elsewhere, if possible.

In the Caucasus, meanwhile, the Russians were very slowly driving back the Turks and advancing on Erzerum, but, with winter weather coming on, it was most improbable that they could quickly achieve a decisive success.

The situation in the Constantinople area and on the Caucasus front seemed, from the Turkish standpoint, sufficiently well in hand to allow troops to be withdrawn from those theatres of war and sent to reinforce the army in Mesopotamia; and the General Staff at the War Office were

not without indications that this was the enemy's intention.

In short, the purely local significance of the campaign in Mesopotamia—with its original object of upholding British interests and prestige at the head of the Persian Gulf—was becoming merged in the complicated web of Imperial effort extending to theatres of operations all over the world. Unfortunately, these efforts were incompletely co-ordinated one with another, and in Mesopotamia, where—in view of the consistent success of General Nixon—all eyes now began to look for a successful extension of British military enterprise, affairs were not under the control of the Imperial General Staff at the War Office, but were the separate responsibility of another Government Department—the India Office.

Meanwhile, with Middle Eastern policy developing along ambitious lines, in Mesopotamia the strategical situation was none too sound. By the victory at Kut and the pursuit to Aziziyeh, the II Indian Army Corps, had become greatly dispersed, and it now lay scattered in detail over the theatre of operations. At and above Kut was the striking force, composed of General Townshend's 6th Indian Division, the 6th Cavalry Brigade, a small proportion of artillery and Divisional troops, and a portion of an extra infantry brigade for line of communication duties. Behind this force, small detachments from the 12th Indian Division were strung out along the Tigris to Basra, where the Inspector General of Communications had his Headquarters, and where there were two battalions of infantry and some technical and administrative units; at Nasiriyeh there was a "mixed brigade" from the 12th Division; in Arabistan there was a regiment of cavalry and two companies of infantry, and at Bushire there was the detachment which had been placed under General Nixon's command. The general result of this distribution (shown in detail in Appendix B) was that General Nixon had no strategic reserve with which to back up his striking force, nor did it seem at all likely that, in view of the uncertain attitude of the tribes in Arabistan and on the Euphrates, he would be able to carry out his previous intention to withdraw troops from Ahwaz and Nasiriyeh and concentrate them on the Tigris. However, General Nixon himself seemed satisfied with the situation, and on October 3rd, after the victory at Kut, he telegraphed to the Commander-in-Chief in India, "I consider I am strong enough to open road to Baghdad and "with this intention I propose to concentrate at Aziziyeh." Two days later, he telegraphed that failure to press his

advantage would have a bad effect locally on British prestige, that his enemy was demoralised and could easily be outmanœvred and destroyed, and that he himself could "see "nothing which would justify letting slip such an oppor- "tunity ... because ... from a military point of view "Baghdad is a focus of Turkish lines of advance ... of which "it is vital to deprive the enemy apart from any political "effect." General Nixon then went on to state that the troops he had with him were sufficient to enable him to inflict decisive defeat upon the Turks and to seize Baghdad, but that in order to hold the city he would require reinforcements which, he suggested, should consist of another division of infantry and a regiment of British cavalry. For the first time, we now find General Nixon laying stress upon the military value of Baghdad—and when we analyse that value we find that in essentials it was very much the same as the value of Kut or of Nasiriyeh, namely that Baghdad could be used as an advanced base for a hostile counter-offensive. One is led to ask where this process of depriving the enemy of possible advance bases was to stop; if Kut, why not Baghdad; if Baghdad why not Tekrit, and so on—the point to note being that the further we went into the enemy's country in order to deprive him of his advanced bases, the longer, more difficult and more vulnerable our own communications became.

However, without discussing the situation with his staff, General Nixon continued to advocate the advance to Baghdad both for the military reason outlined above as well as for the politically important results which it could achieve—the stabilisation of the political situation in Persia likely to be achieved by depriving hostile propaganda of its centre, Baghdad, and the heightening of British prestige in the eyes of the whole world.

For us, wise in the knowledge of what happened afterwards, it is difficult to acquiesce in General Nixon's appreciation of the situation. Strategically, his situation was unsound because his force was dispersed and he had no general reserve; administratively, the condition of affairs was most unsatisfactory, and there was little or no prospect of an improvement in this respect before the asked-for reinforcements could arrive —because the demands of the administrative services could not be met from India. Already, by going outside the confines of the Basra Vilayet the Expedition had passed beyond the scope of its original task without a proportionate augmentation in strength or in ability to maintain itself. Now we

find General Nixon recommending a step which involved the addition of another hundred miles to the difficult communications and was almost certain to stimulate the enemy—for the first time—into taking strong counter measures.

General Nixon's judgment on this point has been very severely criticised by the Commission which subsequently was set up to enquire into the cause of his failure in Mesopotamia, and he has been bitterly blamed for his lack of discretion. But if we pause to consider the human factor in the situation, the factor which is of primary importance in solving any military problem, we can scarcely avoid coming to the conclusion that General Nixon's attitude was the inevitable outcome of the influence of success upon an optimistic nature. He believed himself to have been appointed to instil the spirit of the offensive; by hard fighting and by sheer administrative improvisation he had succeeded —not once, but four times—where a leader with more cautious temperament would have feared to tread; by consistently accepting a "sporting risk" he had achieved a series of brilliant victories, with the result that he had come to look upon his troops as invincible, and his enemy as impotent. He was the only leader among all the Commanders-in-Chief of the various Allied enterprises who had consistently compelled success, and—with that reputation to maintain—he found himself a hundred miles from Baghdad, which he knew to be the coveted object of Indian policy, and for which he had been ordered to prepare a plan of capture when he was first appointed to his command.* There was, apparently, nothing but a handful of demoralised enemy between him and his prize; to move swiftly to seize it was to complete the achievement of his force and to set British prestige on an unassailable height. Psychologically, the effect of brilliant, but narrowly won, success upon a naturally impulsive and sanguine temperament is an interesting study: in this particular example the effect was to cause General Nixon to under-estimate every difficulty which stood in his path.

It must not be imagined, however, that the decision on so important a point of policy and strategy rested with General Nixon alone—he was the military commander, whose rôle is to give effect to the policy of his Government. Ever since it was first mooted by Colonel Cox, the proposal to

* He never did submit any plan for the capture of Baghdad until this moment.

advance to Baghdad had been more or less permanently under consideration at the India Office and in India. Now, the dash and energy of the operations which culminated in the victory at Kut stirred popular enthusiasm at Home, and brought General Nixon's series of successes to the public eye. Realising this, the Military Secretary at the India Office quickly apprehended that there would be a general desire on the part of the public to see these successes exploited to the utmost, and he foresaw that British policy would seek to achieve an even more spectacular triumph in the Middle East.

The soundness of attempting to gain a military conquest simply as a conquest—that is, without achieving a definitely valuable strategical result—is open to question, and the Military Secretary, who appreciated the situation with great clearness, brought out several points which seemed to show that strategically the advance to Baghdad was dangerous. He said that even if General Nixon got to Baghdad he had not enough troops to hold the place without entirely depleting his reserve—which already was practically non-existent; that close to the city there were no suitable tactical positions from which to defend his flanks and communications; and, having strongly emphasised the need for husbanding Imperial resources and not expending them in what was after all only a secondary theatre of war, he concluded by saying "If we do not stop him, General Nixon will soon "be in Baghdad, regardless of orders, and we shall then be "faced with the grave alternatives of either having to with-"draw, or to make our occupation effective." This strong expression of opinion naturally created grave doubt in the mind of the Secretary of State for India, who was the authority responsible for the conduct of the campaign, and at this point the General Staff at the War Office was asked for an authoritative opinion on the matter. A section of the General Staff had been in touch with the progress of the campaign but, having had no responsibility for the operations, and knowing practically no details of the military situation, its conclusions, naturally, were very general. However, on the whole, the General Staff agreed with the Military Secretary at the India Office, and appreciated that from the local point of view the advance was undesirable because it must "leave "us weak everywhere" in Mesopotamia ... In effect, then, military opinion at Home was unanimous in recommending that General Nixon should "sit tight," holding what he had got with the troops he had, rather than that he should embark on an enterprise which must eventually make heavy

demands on our scanty reserves of man power and resources.

In India, however, the optimistic views of General Nixon were enthusiastically received at Army Headquarters, although it must have been realised there that his demands for river-transport, a light railway, and other requirements for improving the maintenance of his force had not been—and could not be—met, and that, therefore, the administrative situation in Mesopotamia was thoroughly unsatisfactory.

However divided military opinion at Home and in India might be, political opinion was unanimously inclined towards the advance. At first the Secretary of State had shown a desire to play for safety—indeed on October 4th, after the victory at Kut, he had wired definitely limiting further operations to the control of the Basra Vilayet—but, influenced by the Viceroy who reinforced his own arguments by the strong recommendations of General Nixon and Colonel Cox, the "men on the spot," and emphasised the extreme importance of raising our prestige in Persia and Afghanistan, the Dardanelles and the Balkans, he hesitated, and then began to veer towards a "forward" policy.

Privately, the Viceroy wrote to him saying the advance was necessary in order to prevent Persia and Afghanistan from declaring against us; his fear of Moslem influence on the North West Frontier of India impelled him to state, "I am "confident that the right policy is to take the risk ..." a risk which neither he nor his military adviser appreciated at its real gravity. It must be remembered that this advice was based on local grounds—the security of India. To this the Viceroy's whole outlook was restricted. Unfortunately, at that moment, machinery for effectively co-ordinating the military policy of India with that of the Empire as a whole did not exist, because at that time the responsibilities and functions proper to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff had not been determined. The Cabinet decided that the political advantages of occupying Baghdad were so great that every effort must be made to render the step possible, but, in order to thresh out the question, formed a special Interdepartment Committee to consider it.

At the Committee, both Lord Kitchener personally and the General Staff as a whole showed themselves opposed to the advance; whereupon a joint Naval Staff and General Staff appreciation of the situation in Mesopotamia and Syria was called for.

In his recommendation for the advance, the Viceroy had supported General Nixon's request for more troops (one

Division and one Cavalry Regiment); in doing so he added that it was essential that they should arrive in Baghdad not later than one month after its occupation, as this—he estimated—was the period required by the enemy for the preparation of a counter-stroke. The administrative situation remained completely in the background. The difficulties of transporting these troops from the base or of maintaining them in the field do not appear to have been considered, nor were General Nixon's requirements in river transport even made known to the Military Secretary at the India Office, who represented that Department on the Special Committee.

On the 21st, the Naval and Military appreciation of the situation was laid before the Committee. Its chief points were:—that while the early occupation of Baghdad seemed feasible, it was uncertain that General Nixon could retain it; that, even allowing for Turkish difficulties in the inter-reinforcement of their various battle-fronts, it was possible for the enemy to concentrate sixty thousand men in or near Baghdad by the end of January; that two or more Indian Divisions could be made available and might enable General Nixon successfully to meet this counter stroke; and, finally, that the moral advantages of the advance were likely to be very great. Nevertheless, Lord Kitchener, Secretary of State for War, was still opposed to any more serious undertaking than a raid on the city.

The prospect of reinforcements being made available brought about a distinct change in military opinion at the India Office and in India. At Army Headquarters it was pointed out that "Baghdad in the hands of the Turks be-"comes the base for operations by both Tigris and Euphrates "lines and for the coercion of Persia, whilst politically, "failure to seize what appears to be within our grasp would "be interpreted as weakness throughout Asia ..." It was not realised that the arrival of reinforcements must still further prejudice the administrative situation.

On the 21st, the War Committee asked the Viceroy for his considered opinion. On the 23rd, without having consulted the Commander-in-Chief, his responsible military adviser, the Viceroy answered, saying that he accepted the risk of advancing and stating that he would order General Nixon to march on Baghdad at once.

The War Committee approved this step, with the proviso that before advancing General Nixon was to satisfy himself of his ability to capture Baghdad, and ordered the despatch of

two Indian Divisions from France and one British Cavalry Regiment from India to Mesopotamia.

The foregoing outline gives only the barest precis of the vast mass of correspondence which led up to the decision. The flood of telegrams—official and private—which poured between the Secretary of State and the Viceroy, the Viceroy and Colonel Cox, the Commander-in-Chief and General Nixon, General Nixon and General Townshend; the minutes and appreciations which were produced by the various staffs and secretariats, are too copious to be examined or quoted here. It is necessary to mention them in order to show how incredibly cumbersome the machinery of control was, and how for three weeks an Army was held back from taking decisive action (if for a moment we assume it to have been capable of advancing) against a broken enemy—or alternatively, was prevented from making strategic dispositions for defence—while divided responsibilities were discussed at committees, and opinions were bandied about from office to office and continent to continent.

Whether an immediate advance on Baghdad would have succeeded—had it been possible to carry it out; whether General Townshend could have forestalled the hostile reinforcements and retained his hold on the city are matters of speculation; the point is that although the strategical possibility of an advance to Baghdad had been in view ever since General Nixon's original instructions from the Commander-in-Chief in India, it had never been considered in co-ordination with strategical aims elsewhere.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature in what was a very remarkable situation was the failure of all the responsible authorities to realise either the interdependence of fighting and administration, or the condition of the forces in Mesopotamia.

Although General Nixon had made repeated requests for more transport, although he had quite strongly represented his administrative difficulties, and although the General Staff in India knew how little had been done to improve the condition of affairs, it seemed to be expected that by some miracle of administration only comparable to the miracle of the loaves and fishes an expedition whose system of maintenance was already, to say the least of it, precarious, could double itself, add a hundred miles to its communications, and still "carry on" without disaster.

If the administrative situation was unsound, the "fight-

ing" situation was by no means promising. Although, during the whole discussion which led up to the decision to advance, General Nixon's ability to defeat the enemy in front of him had never been seriously questioned, there were at this time important strategical developments taking place. From reports from the General Staff at the War Office, from Egypt and elsewhere General Nixon learned that Turkish reinforcements were moving from the Caucasus, Mosul (Upper Mesopotamia), and Syria towards Baghdad. Some of these reports were vague, others were contradictory, and at Force Headquarters, which was permanently beset by rumours and counter-rumours, not much attention was paid to them—the intelligence of the local situation, the enemy's strength and dispositions about Ctesiphon, was far too absorbing in interest. During the first fortnight in November, however, certain mutually-confirmatory reports were received from separate sources to the effect that a Turkish Division under the command of Khalil Pasha, was moving from Bitlis to Baghdad, and that there were indications of the movement of troops eastward from Konia and Deir ez Zor.*

On November 16th, General Nixon received a report from the War Office that Khalil's division was reliably reported to have left Bitlis for Baghdad and that an expedition under the command of General von der Golz was on its way to Mesopotamia. On the 19th, General Townshend gained local intelligence of the arrival of Turkish reinforcements on the Tigris.

General Nixon, however, remained sceptical on these points. Similar reports had so often proved unfounded that he had come to regard them all as a cry of "wolf"; after all, it seemed to him quite probable that this particular news was spread by the enemy to delay his advance. He estimated that the minimum time required for the transfer of troops from the Constantinople area to Baghdad was eight weeks; and from Bitlis, five; he was of opinion, therefore, that Turkish reinforcements could not arrive in time to interfere with his plans for the immediate future. He replied to the War Office telegram that he had already had the information a fortnight earlier from his own agents, and that he did not accept it. We must realise that General Nixon's intelligence service was considerably hampered by the difficulty of tapping really reliable sources in a country where the inhabitants' idea of giving information is to state what

* *Vide* Map No. 1.

they think it will be pleasing to hear, and his power to get "strategical" information was restricted by the scarcity of aeroplanes in his force. He had few machines available for reconnaissance, either close or distant, and when, on November 11th, one of the few was lost, he was obliged to discontinue distant reconnaissance altogether—and that during the critical preparatory stage of his operations.

However, he had made up his mind that even if hostile reinforcements arrived, he could deal with them better by getting to Baghdad first: therefore, he steadily continued preparations for the advance, which were much delayed by shortage of river transport and by the low water level of the Tigris in what was the driest season of the year. These preparations included the formation of an advanced base at Kut, sufficient to hold two months', and one at Aziziyeh to hold twenty-one days' supplies.

By November 14th everything was ready, and the forward concentration of General Townshend's column was completed at Aziziyeh, where sixteen to seventeen thousand out of the twenty-five thousand rifles of the Expeditionary force were assembled together, relying for supplies upon a heterogeneous collection of transport, which included a thousand mules, six hundred camels, six hundred carts, two hundred donkeys, and some bullocks and cows, as well as the shipping on the river—a most unwieldy organisation.

On November 5th, General Townshend, still in the first flush of enthusiasm after his victory at Kut, had confidently submitted to General Nixon a plan of advance, but later on, having had time to review the situation, he came to realise the risks of his position more acutely than did his commander, and he began to feel less confident about the state of his troops, whom he saw to be tired and depleted by sickness.

On the 20th, the day before General Townshend issued his orders for the advance, a most unfortunate accident occurred —the loss of three out of the five remaining aeroplanes. This was a real disaster, because intelligence about the enemy's strength and dispositions was still vague and contradictory, and while General Nixon and his Headquarters Staff estimated the strength to be thirteen thousand rifles and thirty-nine guns, General Townshend put it down as ten thousand nine hundred rifles and thirty guns. In point of fact, neither estimate was correct. While General Nixon imagined that General Townshend had in front of him not more than three and a half weak divisions, the arrival of Turkish reinforcements from Bitlis and Mosul (as reported by the

General Staff at the War Office) had brought up the hostile strength at and about Ctesiphon to eighteen thousand rifles. The arrival of these reinforcements had actually been observed by the pilot of one of the three aeroplanes just before he was brought down on the 20th; and to add irony to the disaster, his map—marked with the new Turkish dispositions—was of great assistance to the Turkish commander, who had had no map at all. The numerical reinforcement of the enemy was not his only accession of strength. The two new divisions which had arrived, the 45th and 51st, were of a different quality from the rather poor troops which so far had been encountered in Mesopotamia; their morale was high and their discipline good.

Here, then, is the situation on November 20th:—General Townshend was about to attack with thirteen thousand seven hundred rifles a force of eighteen thousand, which he thought to be eleven thousand, but of which he told his troops that it was only ten thousand. Admittedly, his troops were tired and, perhaps, a trifle shaky; nevertheless, deliberately to under-estimate the enemy's strength in order to raise morale —General Townshend's reason—is a proceeding of which we may question the wisdom.

General Townshend's plan was to advance along the left bank of the Tigris from Lajj* with the object of manœuvring the Turks out of their prepared positions at Ctesiphon into the open. On November 21st he issued his orders to this effect at a Conference of subordinate commanders. Full details of his plan are given in the Official History, Vol. II; here it is enough to say that it depended for success upon the accurate converging movements of widely separated columns, which—a most important point —were to be brought to battle without a general reserve, the whole force being deployed in the attack. Quite apart from this departure from accepted tactical principles, we, knowing now what the Commanders did not know then, see that both strategically and tactically the situation was extremely perilous; knowing what the Commanders *did* know, we must realise that administratively it was desperate. General Townshend had with him insufficient transport, supplies and medical resources; reinforcements could not be got up to him even had they been available; his

* *Vide* Map No. 2.

system of maintenance was designed on the assumption that Baghdad would be captured and that as casualties would be treated there, river transport—of which more than half was taken up for grain, fodder and firewood—would become available for general purposes; while he estimated his casualties at two thousand four hundred, in the so-called "hospital" ships there was accommodation for, at the outside, fifteen hundred. If strategically the situation contained possibilities of perils, administratively it had all the elements of disaster.

The first movement in the battle of Ctesiphon was the advance of the leading column at 1430 hours on the 21st, as a preliminary to the attack which was launched at dawn on the 22nd. At first the operation met with success, despite the fact that from various causes its timing was considerably upset. The artillery and rifle fire of the defence was unexpectedly accurate and heavy, and from the fierceness of the fighting it soon became apparent that General Townshend's troops were up against a different class of opposition from any they had encountered before. Still, with dogged endurance they achieved a wonderful advance across five thousand yards of open plain, and managed to establish themselves in the enemy's second line of defence, taking many prisoners and some guns. By five in the afternoon, however, so heavy were the casualties and so great was the exhaustion of the troops that General Townshend was forced to realise that he had shot his bolt, and that all he could do was to draw off and to concentrate his scattered forces for a renewal of the attack next day.

As the evening wore on, and the casualty returns came in, showing a loss of four thousand five hundred, he began to see that even this was out of the question, and to apprehend that re-organisation of his forces at all that night would be very difficult. Fortunately for him, the enemy, too, had fought to a standstill, and instead of counter attacking remained in their second line all night, contenting themselves with bringing up the only fresh reserves they had, two battalions of the 51st Division, to the battlefield, thus completing the concentration of their Army, which now became re-organised into two Army Corps—the XIII (35th and 38th Divisions) and the XVIII (45th and 51st Divisions).

At dawn on the 23rd, General Townshend, who was under the impression that the Turks had been heavily reinforced during the previous day, decided that any resumption of an offensive was impossible, and that his only sound course was

to concentrate his force on the river as soon as he could. Nur ud Din, the Turkish Commander, realising the situation, decided to launch a counter-attack, and at 1500 hours that day the Turkish XIII corps moved forward, followed an hour later by the XVIII. By 1900 hours a general action had begun, an action which lasted throughout the night and which was so vigorous and determined that General Townshend concluded that the enemy had again been reinforced.

Meanwhile, a tragic situation had arisen. Medical personnel organised for dealing with a few hundred casualties was endeavouring to cope with three thousand five hundred cases, working in conditions almost too terrible to describe. Hospital ships with accommodation for five hundred had been made ready at Lajj, but these were soon filled with the casualties which came trickling back over the desert before ever the main battle was joined; consequently, when on the night of the 22nd the battle casualties began to arrive, their thin clothing soaked through, and their bodies almost flayed by the bitter wind which was blowing, no room could be found for them. These men, jolted over the rough desert in the springless, cushionless Army Transport Carts which had been improvised as ambulances—ambulances so ineffective that wounded men with broken limbs threw themselves out and crawled across the desert on hands and knees rather than endure the agony of the shaking, or used dead bodies as cushions between them and the bottom of the carts—these men arrived to be stuffed into a ship, closer than hounds are packed into a hound-van, there to endure the voyage to Basra. Small steamers carried as many as six hundred cases, and the condition of these ships on arrival (after a voyage which in some instances lasted thirteen days because the Tigris communications were raided by Arab Irregulars, and the ships as an alternative to running the gauntlet of rifle fire from the banks had to turn back) was indescribable.

By nine o'clock on the morning of the 24th, General Townshend had succeeded in concentrating practically the whole of his force, and for the sake of prestige he had determined to stand where he was instead of withdrawing to his ships at Lajj, a decision which General Nixon approved. That night, Nur ud Din, mystified by General Townshend's action and misled by a report that the British were advancing again, ordered a general retirement, which actually began at four o'clock the next morning, though later in the day, when it was found that no British advance had been made, the movement was stopped and the column counter-marched.

By mid-day on the 25th, General Townshend, ignorant of his enemy's withdrawal, decided after all to retire on the 26th to Lajj, having come to the sound conclusion that strategical and tactical considerations must outweigh the uncertain value of political prestige.

During the afternoon, the columns of the enemy which had retired during the night marched forward from the river Diayala and—the retirement having passed unnoticed—were put down by General Townshend as large fresh reinforcements, a fact which determined him to continue to retire, and he at once issued the necessary orders for the move.

By 0100 hours on the 26th his force, followed by the Turks, whose cavalry, aided by local Arabs, pressed his retreat, reached Lajj. During the 27th it continued the retirement, covered by the 6th Cavalry Brigade.

By 1000 hours on the 28th, the whole force reached Aziziyeh, where the two next days were spent in evacuating wounded and stores. Meanwhile, General Townshend, who was still under the impression that large Turkish reinforcements had arrived, decided to retire on Kut because, he said, "as we may "not be able to advance on Baghdad till March, Kut is indi- "cated as a most suitable place for concentration of troops."

On the 30th, therefore, the retirement re-commenced, followed up by the enemy—whose Cavalry Brigade contrived to lose itself and to operate behind its own main body, reporting its movements as the movements of the British. On the night 30/31st, the Turks made a sudden attack, but after hot fighting, General Townshend extricated his forces and again withdrew, making a twenty-six mile march to Qala Shadi, which the column reached at 0200 hours on the night 1/2nd, resuming the retirement at daybreak.

On the morning of the 3rd, the 6th Division, by then almost non-effective from losses and fatigue, reached Kut—the Turks not far behind them.

Thus, the brilliant series of successes was broken. Instead of a triumphal entry into Baghdad—the spectacular triumph which was to be received with world-wide acclamation—General Townshend had temporarily gained a very dearly-bought tactical success, and sustained a severe strategical defeat.

Its real severity was appreciated by neither General Nixon nor the Government of India. When the retreat began, General Nixon was still visualising carrying out an offensive rôle, which, he said, he would be ready to

do by the middle of March, provided that his transport was immediately augmented *, that reinforcements and drafts reached him by the middle of January, and that the co-operation of the Russians—who by this time had increased the number of their troops in north west Persia, and had a force of eleven thousand men moving on Hamadan—was secured.

With such confidence did he view the situation that he refused even to consider the alternative of selecting a defensive position down-stream of Kut nearer his base.

His views were upheld by the Viceroy, who still clung strongly to the conviction that to occupy Baghdad was the best means of countering German intrigue in Persia and Afghanistan, and that success in Mesopotamia was the main factor in keeping these countries—and India—quiet. While approving General Nixon's attitude, he asked the Secretary of State for yet another division to be added to Force "D," making it up to five in all. No one seems to have realised that it was impossible for the river transport of the force to be "immediately augmented" because suitable craft were not in existence, and that neither the base, the communications nor the transport system could possibly be expanded in time effectively to maintain a sudden influx of reinforcements. The administrative factor, the governing factor on the strategical situation, still remained unappreciated.

Whatever his plans for the future, General Nixon was confronted with a demand for an immediate decision on an important point of strategy. He had to decide whether or not General Townshend was to continue to retire. In considering the point, he was influenced by his intention of renewing his offensive in the Spring. He knew that to continue to retire would shorten his overstrained communications, lighten the load on the transport system, and impose upon the enemy—should he choose to advance—all those administrative difficulties from which he himself was suffering at the moment. He realised that General Townshend would be retiring towards his reinforcements—an important point because of the intense shortage of river transport, and the delay involved in marching troops just off ship-board over desert roads in (probably) wet weather—and that Kut offered no strong positions for defence, was insanitary beyond words, and depended for maintenance on long and precarious communications. On the other hand,

* He did not appear to realise that this was impossible.

if he was going to resume the offensive (and if he had not accurately appreciated the administrative situation), obviously it was desirable to continue to hold Kut as his advance base, and he argued "prestige" would suffer if he continued to retire.

Kut, which stood at the junction of the Tigris and the Hai, had a certain strategical importance because it commanded the main Turkish line of advance from Baghdad against Basra; moreover, Kut contained a considerable amount of stores of all kinds, which could not be entirely evacuated by the shipping which was available. Further, it could be argued that certain political advantages would be gained by the occupation of Kut, advantages which might help General Nixon to control the Basra Vilayet and the oilfields area. The decision was, to some extent, taken out of General Nixon's hands by General Townshend, who telegraphed on the 2nd December that his troops were too exhausted to move, that there was no time to evacuate the stores, and that therefore he must remain where he was. In reply, General Nixon, gave a free hand to his subordinate commander, saying that his own intention, having regard to the future, was to concentrate as far forward as possible. Two days later, General Nixon approved a proposal from General Townshend to make Kut into an entrenched camp, and said he hoped to effect its relief in two months, for which purpose he was going to concentrate his reinforcements at Amara. General Townshend, who had expected to be relieved after, at most, a month, was considerably taken aback by this intelligence, and on the 6th December he telegraphed to General Nixon saying that to wait two months for relief was to risk being invested by a very large force—he estimated it at six divisions—and that therefore he proposed to withdraw from Kut to Ali Gharbi, 40 miles above Amara, and to make his stand there, acting as covering force to the main concentration. He said that at Kut his position was unsound because he was confined in a narrow peninsula which could easily be surrounded by the enemy, that his troops were rested and that he still had time to withdraw and to save most of his ammunition and his heavy guns, or alternatively, to destroy them.

Meanwhile, in India, the General Staff had been busying themselves with the situation, but seemed unwilling to accept the responsibility for a decision. They had calculated from the latest intelligence reports that by the middle of January the enemy would be strong enough both to contain General

Townshend's force and to detach twenty thousand men to oppose his relief; consequently they felt that Kut ought to be evacuated. The Commander-in-Chief, however, put the onus of the decision—presumably not realising that the point was of vital importance not only to General Nixon, but also to the Empire—on the "man on the spot," telling General Nixon at the same time that the reinforcements which he expected from France had been delayed by transport difficulties and by hostile submarines in the Mediterranean. General Nixon, who at the time was in very poor health, accepted the responsibility, refused to relinquish his idea for a renewed offensive, and telegraphed to General Townshend saying he did not approve of the suggested withdrawal to Ali Gharbi. His reasons were that he considered the estimate of two months for the relief operations was an outside one, as within the next week he would have a brigade of cavalry and a brigade of infantry concentrated at Ali Gharbi behind Townshend; that to withdraw from Kut would open the line of the Hai to a hostile advance, and would be extremely bad for British prestige and morale; and that, as at present the Turks were making no fresh forward movement, it was not a military necessity. In coming to this decision General Nixon counted on his two reinforcing divisions arriving by 31st December, and on receiving a measure of help from a Russian advance in north-west Persia—neither event justified his hope—but he still appears to have left out of the picture the administrative difficulties of maintaining an advance. However, on the 7th December General Townshend replied that he was completely reassured by the prospect of the early arrival of troops at Ali Gharbi and that he would remain at Kut. That evening, he reported that bodies of hostile troops had moved down-stream past Kut on both banks of the river, and that on the left bank up-stream of him there were two divisions of the enemy. The Turks had closed in; the siege had begun.

In arriving at the decision to stand at Kut there was the same lack of definite, clear-cut appreciation of the risk in the situation as there had been in coming to the decision to advance to Baghdad. Then failure at Ctesiphon had never been contemplated, and there was no strategic reserve with which to restore the situation when failure came: now, the only reserve which General Nixon had was two divisions on the sea, two divisions whose time of arrival was uncertain, and whose maintenance must be precarious. At the beginning of December the river transport consisted of six-

teen small steamers, twelve tugs and forty-seven barges, which gave a maximum daily delivery of a hundred and seventy-five tons for *all* services—and this organisation was to expand to serve two more divisons! The factors of time, space and administration were not properly appreciated; General Nixon's strategy after the failure at Ctesiphon was purely opportunist. First, the vital decision to stand at Kut—a matter on which the safety of the whole force depended—was left to a subordinate commander, General Townshend. General Townshend himself was not consistent; he wished to remain at Kut because his troops were tired, then he wished to retire as soon as they were rested. The General Staff in India favoured withdrawal — with excellent reason — but they shelved the responsibility and left it to General Nixon, whom they knew to be obsessed with the idea of another offensive. General Nixon, in turn, left it to General Townshend, who made a last effort to come away—then accepted his responsibility as G.O.C. in Chief and stopped the withdrawal.

It is a lamentable example of lack of strategical foresight and of the danger of considering a military problem from one aspect only—the fighting aspect. Sound strategical principles were neglected because of the fatal political attraction of Baghdad, and of the fancied necessity for upholding prestige by refusing to give up ground. These factors were allowed to outweigh the facts that it was physically impossible to maintain a large-scale offensive until the whole campaign in Mesopotamia had been completely reorganised; that to seek to bolster up prestige by risking the whole of General Townshend's division three hundred miles from its base was radically unsound; that it might have been possible definitely to decide to withdraw the 6th Division on the 4th December, after it was rested, and to have evacuated at least a reasonable proportion of essential military stores. As it was, by the 7th December General Townshend was shut up in Kut; reinforcements were slowly approaching, piecemeal, without proper organisation or staffs; nothing effective was being done to help General Nixon in his administrative difficulties.

In the telegram to General Townshend, informing him of his final decision, General Nixon said, "So long as you "remain at Kut . . . you are fulfilling the duties of a detach-"ment by holding up superior numbers."

It was a detachment which was to prove infinitely more costly to the British Empire than to the enemy.

CHAPTER VI.

The general situation in Mesopotamia in December, 1915—The conclusions of the War Committee—British policy after the anticipated relief of Kut—The first phase in the attempt at relief; the battles of Sheikh Saad, the Wadi and el Hanneh—The second phase; the operations on the right bank; the battle of the Dujailah—The third phase; The capture of the Hanneh and Fallahiyeh positions; the succession of the failures at Sannaiyat; Bait Issa; the "Julnar"—The surrender of Kut—Reflections on the relief operations.

In themselves, the defeat of General Townshend's force at Ctesiphon and its subsequent assumption of the role of a passively defensive "strategic detachment" were serious enough: in addition, they produced an unfavourable repercussion on the general situation in Mesopotamia, because—always anxious to back the winning side—the tribesmen began to waver in their allegiance to the British. Not only on the Tigris did the military situation give cause for anxiety: elsewhere, on the Euphrates at Nasiriyeh, on the lines of communication, in the important tribal areas about Shattra (on the Hai) and around the oilfields there were signs of unrest; and all the time rumour succeeded rumour that hostile reinforcements were arriving.

At Home matters were regarded with anxiety, but at first it was not realised that by standing at Kut, General Nixon had irrevocably dispersed his forces and that therefore the strategical situation on the Tigris was definitely compromised.

On the 24th December, the Turks made a heavy attack upon Kut, an attack in which General Townshend gained identifications of a fresh hostile division, the 52nd (from the Caucasus); the rumoured reinforcements were arriving. The attack, which was beaten off with very great determination, cost the Turks so many casualties that they seem to have decided then and there to abandon an active siege and to reduce Kut by blockade alone, and on the 26th, with this object in view, they commenced to move more troops down the river on the left bank to interpose them between General Townshend and any force coming up to attempt his relief. Thus Kut became entirely beleaguered, and General Townshend, who had at first estimated that he had rations at full scale for

one month for British troops and two months for Indians, urgently asked for his relief to be accomplished not later than the middle of January, because, he said (not realising that the Turks did not intend to press their attacks), his ammunition would not hold out for many actions like that of the 24th.

On the 28th, the War Committee, which had been holding a series of deliberations on the situation ever since the 13th, but without coming to any practical conclusion,* once more considered the opinions of innumerable authorities :—the Secretary of State for India; his Military Secretary; the General Staff at the War Office (who accepted no responsibility); the Viceroy; his Commander-in-Chief, and *his* Chief of Staff, and, of course, General Nixon.

The conclusions to which the Committee came were :—that no more divisions could be made available for Mesopotamia because France was the main theatre of war and it was there that our maximum strength must be maintained (it was essential to keep an adequate force in Egypt); that after the relief of Kut (which it was assumed would be effected by the forces then in the country) British policy in Mesopotamia was to be purely defensive; and that with this in view defensive positions should be prepared at Qurna and Shaiba.

In other words, after the relief of General Townshend, the Expedition was to restrict its activities to enforcing our original policy in Mesopotamia.

The relief of Kut, however, was not the simple problem it appeared to be. General Nixon was faced with two main alternative courses :—either to operate quickly with the troops which he had got, or to complete the concentration of all his reinforcements before attempting battle. The situation in the matter of reinforcements was most unsatisfactory. The arrival of the 3rd and 7th Divisions from France had been very much delayed and the subordinate formations and units of the divisions were arriving piecemeal, because there had not been available at Marseilles suitable ships for trooping purposes and because in order to hasten the arrival of the convoy at Basra the troops had not stopped in Egypt for re-organisation—as had been intended. The general result was that General Aylmer, who arrived at Amara from India to take

* At the conference on the 13th, the Secretary of State for India, who was responsible for the campaign, was not present—not having been summoned.

command of the relief-force, the Tigris Corps, on the 12th December, estimated that by the 3rd January he would have only the 7th Division, the Cavalry Brigade, and one Infantry Brigade ready to advance, and that not until three weeks later would his whole Corps be ready.

General Townshend was urgently demanding relief by the middle of January, which meant that General Aylmer must advance not later than the 3rd; General Nixon, therefore, decided that, although he was most unwilling for the Tigris Corps to advance in detail against an enemy whom he estimated to be considerably its superior in strength, the operations must begin. Accordingly he ordered General Aylmer to advance on the 3rd, with Sheikh Saad* as his objective. By that day, General Aylmer (whose staff was entirely improvised) had succeeded in concentrating the 7th Division, the 6th Cavalry Brigade and certain Corps Troops (16 battalions, 17 squadrons and 42 guns) at Ali Gharbi; meanwhile, from the eastward trend of the Turkish troop-movements he had deduced the fact that the enemy did not intend to risk another heavy assault on Kut and therefore that General Townshend's situation was a little less critical than it had been. Realising that he had a little more time in hand, he modified his plan to the extent of ordering General Younghusband, who was commanding the 7th Division, not to make a decisive attack upon the enemy at Sheikh Saad but merely to pin him to his positions until General Aylmer himself could bring up the remainder of the Tigris Corps.

Unfortunately there was a misunderstanding over this order, with the result that on the 6th January the 7th Division attacked at Sheikh Saad with very insufficient artillery support, and by early morning on the 7th found itself irrevocably committed to a serious battle. General Aylmer himself assumed direction of the operations that day, but in the face of an accurate and heavy artillery and rifle fire, handicapped by mirage and by the fact that the sun was in the eyes of the attackers, he was able to make but little ground. At night heavy rain fell, which made movement difficult, and the next day the attack made no progress. That night, too, it was wet; but in the darkness the Turks evacuated part of their position, so that on the 9th General Aylmer was able to advance to Sheikh Saad, the enemy having retired upstream to Ora and Sinn. It was a step towards Kut, but it was one which cost four thousand British casualties—

* *Vide* Map No. 2.

out of about eighteen thousand effectives—and caused great suffering to the troops.

At this point, General Nixon's health, which had been most indifferent for some weeks—since before the battle of Ctesiphon, in fact—completely broke down and he relinquished the command of the Expedition. Thus, after a series of brilliant successes, he passes out of the history of the campaign to reappear later before the Commission appointed to enquire into its failures and to shoulder practically the whole blame for disaster which was due at least as much to the lack of consistent policy from above as to errors of judgment on his part.

He was succeeded by General Sir Percy Lake, who was at that time Chief of the General Staff in India.

The Tigris Corps, was confronted by a strong and resolute enemy occupying defensive positions at Ora and Sinn —positions whose flanks rested on impassable obstacles, the Suwaikiyeh marsh and the Tigris—but on the 11th January, the Turks somewhat inexplicably came out of these defences and advanced to the line of the Wadi, where their position had its left flank "in the air" in the open desert.

General Aylmer, who felt forced to make an early attempt at General Townshend's relief, saw in the new situation an opportunity to outmanœuvre the enemy. Accordingly, on the 13th he attacked the Turks, relying for success upon the accurate movement and timing of three widely separated columns. As it turned out, neither movement nor timing went according to plan.

The causes of the failure at the Wadi were various—amongst them being the lack of effective means of inter-communication and of maps, and the difficulty of recognising and locating the exact position of troops in the open, featureless desert. The result of the attack was that the 7th Division just failed to envelope the enemy, who slipped away during the night and retired to their position at Hanneh, where once again their flanks were secured, without having been brought to a decisive battle. The 7th Division lost over sixteen hundred casualties in the operation.

The next day, the Division pushed forward to gain touch with the enemy, but on that night heavy rain fell, the river began to rise in flood, and for the next three days the troops could not move forward at all. Meanwhile the enemy went on strengthening his position.

General Townshend, having made a third estimate of his

power to hold out, now said he could last till the 10th February. Nevertheless, General Aylmer felt that he must resume operations again as soon as possible, because it was already the 18th January and he had a long way to go to reach Kut.

By now both the 3rd and 7th infantry divisions of the Tigris Corps had arrived, consequently General Aylmer decided that he was in a position to undertake an attack on Hanneh, although he was restricted to making a frontal attack because the floods on the right bank prevented the movement of troops there. He was short of land transport; his Supply and Transport personnel was less than a quarter of what was required; there was a shortage of artillery ammunition; the reserve ammunition was in barges instead of in the Divisional Ammunition Column; his bridging material was inadequate,* his medical equipment, was less than one third of what he wanted, and his whole force lacked staff, organisation and cohesion. Nevertheless, he planned to push forward on the 21st January with the 7th Division on the left bank, supporting the attack by enfilade fire from such small detachments as he could ferry across the river.

On the 21st, then, the 7th Division attacked the enemy's trenches. By 1115 hours it was definitely held up with very heavy casualties—which is not surprising when one realises that the artillery support consisted of three 18-pounder batteries; two four-inch batteries; one four-point-five battery; one section of four-inch guns; two sections of mountain guns, and one 15-pounder battery; that it was without trench mortars, and was short of machine guns!

At noon it began to rain, and in a very short while the country was transformed into a sea of mud; communications broke down; neither horse, foot, nor wheel could move. General Aylmer's casualties were two thousand seven hundred and forty; the sufferings of the wounded were horrible. Men lay out all night in pitiless, icy rain, dying from exposure because the medical personnel—heroic in its efforts—was hopelessly inadequate to succour them. In the morning, many sepoys were found dead without a mark upon them; others were picked up and were slowly jolted, petrified and sodden with freezing mud, in springless carts to dressing stations which for hours had been nothing better than a shambles. Still later, men arrived at Amara with wounds which for eight days had remained untended—wounds

* Of the fifty Pontoons asked for in November, 1915, only twenty-three had arrived in Basra by the middle of January, 1916.

which were putrifying, gangrenous and full of maggots. Some idea of the condition of the ground may be imagined from the fact that it took an ordinary, fit infantryman two-and-a-half hours to walk four miles. The river was brimming over; indeed the small detachment on the right bank was flooded out altogether. The attack quite definitely had failed, and on the 22nd General Aylmer was compelled to arrange a truce with the enemy to enable him to collect his wounded.

This was the situation which greeted the new Commander, General Lake, on his arrival to take up his command—the situation in which the first phase of the relief operations may be said to have ended. The Tigris Corps had sustained serious defeat, strategically and tactically; administratively the situation was chaotic. On the 21st January, while the 7th Division was being shot down before the trenches at Hanneh, ten thousand men and twelve guns were lying idle at Basra because they could not be got to the front. At the base, the congestion and confusion were indescribable; a long line of ships lay in midstream awaiting off-loading; troops and stores crowded every foot of dry ground. General Lake's first thought was to improve the administrative situation, and at once he initiated the extension of the base, the construction of harbour works, and the investigation of the possibilities of constructing railways and roads.

In a letter to the Secretary of State, the Viceroy said he felt "no anxiety about Kut ..." and went on to deprecate the use of the terms "besieged," "relief," etc.; nevertheless the news of the defeat at Hanneh caused considerable alarm both at the War Committee and at Army Headquarters in India—so much so, in fact, that on the 26th January the War Committee called on the Chief of the Imperial General Staff for a full appreciation of the situation in Mesopotamia, set up an inquiry into the control of the campaign, and ordered the G.O.C. in Chief in Egypt to prepare a British Division (the 13th) for despatch to Basra.

On that day, General Townshend informed General Lake that Kut could hold out till the 17th February or "by taking "certain measures ... much longer," a fact—apparently—of which he had been aware for some time but had not divulged for fear of under-representing the urgency for relief. The next day, yet another estimate arrived from him:—"I do "not see why we should not hold out for another two "months ..." (the end of March), and almost immediately afterwards he telegraphed that with the supplies which were

available he could hold out until the 27th April—a somewhat different state of affairs from that indicated by him when he said he must be relieved by the middle of January.

At the end of January, when the relief operations began their second phase, the situation on the Tigris front appeared to be as follows:—The Turks had the 35th and 52nd Divisions at Hanneh; the 51st on the right bank opposite Sinn; the 45th outside Kut; and the 2nd Division arriving in the Kut area. In all, a strength of twenty-four thousand five hundred rifles and seventy-eight guns. The Tigris Corps, on the other hand, even by the middle of February could total no more than twenty-three thousand rifles and seventy-four guns. General Lake, therefore, was in inferior strength at the decisive point; nor was that the worst—the administrative picture was even gloomier. Few additional steamers had arrived—out of twenty-nine sent out to Basra under their own steam from overseas only seven had survived the journey—troops could be moved to the front only very slowly, and without their proper land-transport.

The general situation was prejudiced by the flooded river, which not only afforded the enemy an opportunity of inundating the trenches by cutting the "bunds" at certain points and letting the water through, but also menaced the safety of the storage grounds at the base, and hindered movement along the line of communication both by water and by land. In these circumstances, it will be realised, General Lake's chief problem was to arrive at the maximum number of troops which could be kept mobile and at the same time be effectively maintained. Although, on the arrival of the 13th Division his numbers would be augmented, it did not necessarily follow that his offensive power would show a corresponding increase—unless his transport could be developed sufficiently to maintain the whole Corps in battle. Troops could be concentrated at the front only in a definite proportion to the amount of essential supplies on which the Tigris Corps depended for maintenance, and the fact that the divisions were still without their own proper land-transport hampered them considerably. However, General Lake, realising that delay would allow the enemy to improve his defences but would not increase his own ability to attack, decided to re-commence operations just as soon as General Aylmer could be ready—a course with which General Townshend strongly agreed.

Meanwhile, a very important event in the history of the campaign occurred. Their inquiry into the system of control

of the expedition had led the War Committee to decide that the campaign in Mesopotamia must become a co-ordinated part of our general war-plan, and that it should no longer remain an isolated military enterprise.

It is the responsibility of the Imperial General Staff at the War Office to co-ordinate the whole of the military efforts which are being made to give effect to Imperial policy. On February 16th, 1916, nearly eighteen months after the outbreak of war, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff completed his assumption of that responsibility by taking up the direction of military policy in Mesopotamia. It was arranged that his instructions should be conveyed to the Expedition through the Commander-in-Chief in India; that India was to remain the base of the force, and that questions of policy likely to affect her internal situation and her relations with Persia and the Persian Gulf were to continue to be referred to her Government. In other respects, the campaign was to be carried out as a part of the Imperial war-plan, in the same way as operations in Europe, Egypt and elsewhere were being carried out.

It is difficult to over-estimate the importance of this decision. Mesopotamia and its military demands now bore a definite relationship to the demands which were being made all over the world, and they had to be judged by the result they might have upon the general situation. At this time these demands, particularly in the form of shipping and in material, were heavy, and looked like increasing. The Imperial General Staff found itself committed to an expensive campaign which they had had no real part in framing. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff found himself confronted with the essential need for continuing the operations for the relief of Kut. At this particular moment, the strategical situation seemed to take a favourable turn, because when, on the 17th February, the Russian Army in the Caucasus captured Erzeroum and, on the 25th, their troops in north-west Persia reached Kermanshah—on the road to Baghdad—it looked as if the left rear of the Turks on the Tigris must become susceptible to the threat of our Ally's advance; in fact, the moment seemed favourable for a renewal of General Aylmer's operations.

As an alternative to another assault upon the defences at Hanneh—an operation which was bound to be costly in casualties—it now appeared possible for General Aylmer to contain the enemy in his left-bank position with a detachment, and to advance on the right bank with the largest force he

could make mobile. If he were successful in defeating the Turks on the right bank he would then be able to advance up the Tigris, across the Hai to the Shumran bend* and either to cross to the left bank of the Tigris in rear of the enemy, or to cover withdrawal of the garrison from Kut to the right bank, after which the whole force would be able to fall back. This alternative General Aylmer decided to adopt. His plan was to contain the enemy in the Hanneh position on the left bank with the 7th Division, and to advance along the right bank with a force consisting of four regiments, twenty-eight battalions and sixty-eight guns. In order to obtain surprise this force (which was to march in three separate groups, the first being organised in two separate columns) was to concentrate and move to its battle positions by night, with the object of attacking the right of the enemy's position between Sinn Aftar and the Dujailah redoubt with one group, while another marched round the right flank, and the third was held in reserve. From the point at which the force was to assemble to the point at which the groups were to make their first divergence was six miles; from thence the first two groups were to continue the march for another four-and-a-half miles to a point at which one column of the first group was to form up for the assault, its left covered by the other column and the outer flanks of both columns being protected by the cavalry.

It will be seen even from this very brief outline that the plan was somewhat complicated. When we add to this the fact that at least one of the Group Commanders had only an improvised staff—strangers to him and the troops—to help him, that the country was almost devoid of landmarks, and that in the interests of secrecy reconnaissance had to be restricted, we cannot fail to realise that the operation was one of very considerable difficulty. There was every chance for some small detail to go wrong, and therefore, it seems to us now, it was necessary to allow subordinate commanders considerable initiative in carrying out their tasks. General Aylmer, however, remembering what had happened at the Wadi, sought to ensure success by framing a very detailed, rigid plan, which allowed subordinate commanders no initiative at all, although in his orders he emphasised the need for dash in carrying out the operation.

On the morning of March 4th, while the enterprise was being prepared, General Townshend reported that he had

* *Vide* Map No. 3.

over-estimated the amount of barley by two hundred tons and that he could not hold out later than the 31st. Thereupon General Aylmer decided to attack on the right bank at once. Heavy rain prevented any movement being made earlier than the night of the 7th, but on that night, after dusk, concentration on the right bank was carried out successfully, although it took longer than had been estimated because the Field Artillery batteries and the transport animals marched in one column with the infantry, which occasioned frequent delays on the way to the rendezvous. Consequently, the march of the force after concentration began two-and-a-half hours late, with the result that all the columns did not reach their positions of deployment till after dawn.

Nevertheless, the Turks were completely surprised by the arrival of the British who found the Dujailah redoubt to be practically empty of the enemy. Unfortunately General Kemball, whose column was to make the attack on the redoubt, did not believe this, because it was the usual Turkish practice to remain concealed until the attack was launched. Instead of seizing the opportunity of advancing unopposed over the open plain—which in the face of opposition was a deathtrap in daylight—he ordered his column to take cover in a depression and to make reconnaissance for deployment while he awaited the arrival of the other columns in their proper positions.

General Aylmer, who was in telephonic communication with his subordinates by 0700 hours on the 8th, thinking it impossible that the enemy could have remained unaware of his approach, gave up all hope of surprise, and ordered the Corps Artillery to open fire to cover the forming up of the infantry columns. There was some delay in this, and two of General Kemball's Brigadiers, seeing the enemy hurrying back into his defences and realising that their opportunity of a "cheap" advance was slipping away, asked him to let them advance on the Dujailah redoubt at once. However, General Kemball's orders from above had been so rigidly laid down that he did not feel justified in sanctioning any departure from them and it was not until the whole attack was ready—at 0935 hours—that the leading brigade began to advance. By that time, the enemy had re-occupied his defences and was able to bring heavy and accurate artillery and rifle fire to bear upon the attack. The Turk is a stout fighter in defence; he had in front of him an open plain devoid of cover and commanded by well-sited machine guns

and determined rifle-men. On the other hand, the attack was carried out after a long and tiring night-march in extreme heat (of which the effect was intensified by a shortage of drinking water; it was supported only by light artillery and strategical and tactical surprise had been forfeited. It can hardly astonish us, therefore, to find that in spite of a series of most gallant efforts, which cost three thousand five hundred British and Indian casualties, the attack completely failed. One Infantry Brigade, the 8th, advanced across three thousand yards of open plain to the assault with two thousand three hundred men—they came back one thousand one hundred and twenty-seven strong.

By the evening, it had become obvious that there was nothing for General Aylmer to do but to order a general retirement. He had insufficient transport to maintain the widely-dispersed troops; away from the river there was no drinking water. Administratively the situation was bad; tactically there seemed no chance of a decisive success. Luckily, the Turks did not counter-attack that night, and contented themselves with only following up the force when, having concentrated, it withdrew next day to Orah.

This failure marks the end of the second phase in the relief operations.

Immediately after the battle of the Dujailah Redoubt a new phase of operations began—both sides being driven into their trenches by the arrival of fresh floods. This caused every energy to be devoted to keeping the field works from being washed away. Meanwhile, the 13th Division* was arriving from Egypt.

The 31st March, the limit of General Townshend's endurance, was drawing uncomfortably near, but General Lake's problem was no easier to solve. The Tigris Corps had not sufficient transport to allow an advance to be made on the right bank; moreover the right bank was liable to be inundated at any moment by the floods which the enemy could easily let loose. Therefore, although the Turks on the left bank held a strong, deep, defensive position, General Gorringe, who succeeded General Aylmer in command of the Tigris Corps after the battle of Dujailah, decided to operate there to effect the capture of the Hanneh position—the first line of the Turkish defences. His intention was, after the capture of Hanneh, to transfer his troops to

* The 13th Division was entirely composed of British troops.

the right bank to drive the enemy out of his position at Abu Rumman, and then to advance on both banks to force the enemy out of the defences at Sannaiyat—the final barrier across the road to Kut.

During the remainder of the month, however, heavy rain and high floods made any operations impossible. The 31st came, and Kut still held out. It was not till the 5th April that the attack on Hanneh could be made.

On that day, the 13th Division, which had taken over from the 7th Division four days earlier, assaulted Hanneh at dawn and found it empty, the Turks having gone back to the line Fallahiyeh—Abu Rumman. The same evening, the 13th Division attacked and captured Fallahiyeh which, it now appeared, was only a covering position to the Sannaiyat defences, with a loss of eighteen hundred and eighty-five casualties. Sannaiyat alone remained—and to grapple with it the 7th Division were moved up to Fallahiyeh. At dawn on the 6th, this Division made a gallant attack, but failed to get closer to the enemy's trenches at Sannaiyat than seven hundred yards—and lost sixty per cent. of its strength in doing so. The fate of Kut was hanging in the balance; the fighting was desperate: the 28th Infantry Brigade lost eleven hundred casualties in the first few minutes; the 43rd Light Infantry (Ox. and Bucks) lost *all* its officers and two hundred and twenty out of two hundred and sixty-six other ranks; everywhere the dead lay thick on the ground, but nowhere did the attack get home. Finally, came rain so violent as to stop any immediate renewal of operations, and it was not until three days later that the position was again attacked. This time the 13th Division obtained a footing in the defences, but only to be counter-attacked out again at a cost of eighteen hundred casualties—or forty per cent. of its strength. There followed another period of violent storm and flood when, the left bank having become impassable, the offensive was taken up on the right bank. Here, the Turkish position at Bait Issa was the objective because by cutting the "bund" at that point it was possible for the enemy to inundate the country.

On the 17th April, the 3rd Division assaulted, captured, and afterwards held Bait Issa against a series of very desperate counter-attacks—at the price of sixteen hundred casualties. The enemy, who lost three thousand dead, retired up the river to his position at Es Sinn, but General Gorringe could not exploit his success without transferring reinforcing troops from the left bank, for which time could not be spared.

However, from the strength of the defence at Bait Issa, General Lake and General Gorringe deduced that the enemy must have reduced the garrison at Sannaiyat. They decided, therefore, that in attacking Sannaiyat again at once there lay a chance of gaining immediate success—the only hope of saving Kut. Conditions were bad: between the two front line trenches at Sannaiyat there was a continuous sheet of flood, and the British trenches were completely waterlogged—in fact, only the vital importance of time could justify the Commander in attempting to carry out the operation.

On the 22nd April, at 0700 hours, the 7th Division once more struggled out to the attack. On a very narrow front; lacking adequate artillery support because high explosive shell was running short; in a quagmire which was almost up to men's armpits, the advance floundered forward—to be checked almost at once, with heavy casualties. Then came a hostile counter-attack ... it was impossible to go on; the 7th Division lost thirteen hundred men, the 19th Brigade lost 942 out of 2,165. In four months the Tigris Corps had lost twenty-three thousand five hundred; the Black Watch had forty-eight left out of eight hundred and forty—the 43rd Light Infantry were wiped out; the troops were worn out. Guns were short of high-explosive shell; General Gorringe was still fifteen miles from Kut. It was painfully obvious that, in the circumstances, to attack Sannaiyat again was to risk a debâcle, without achieving the relief of General Townshend and the 6th Division. One last effort to help the defenders of Kut was made. This was on the 24th, when the steamer "Julnar," carrying three weeks' supplies, made an effort to run the gauntlet of the Turkish trenches, and to steam up the river into Kut. This forlorn hope expired at Magasis where, her officers shot down at their posts, the "Julnar" ran into hawsers stretched across the river and fell into the enemy's hands.

Between 15th and 27th April attempts had been made to get supplies to Kut by aircraft, but, although in that time the Royal Flying Corps succeeded in dropping nearly seventeen thousand pounds of stores they failed to avert the end.

On the 29th April, 1916, General Townshend, with his garrison of two thousand seven hundred and fifty British and six thousand five hundred Indian troops, surrendered. General Nixon's "strategic detachment" had cost over forty thousand casualties.

Wise with the knowledge of after-results, in the light of

experience learned from four-and-a-half years of war, it is temptingly easy for us to criticise—to dogmatise—to say that the disaster was due to this or to that; that headlong, piecemeal attacks were futile; that the urgency of the situation was misrepresented by General Townshend; that commanders failed and staffs were inept; that everywhere there was administrative chaos and tactical misdirection. In some measure, these criticisms may be true, but in what measure cannot be judged from the bare outlines contained in this history. Before condemning, we must study the operations in detail. If we make this study, we shall find commanders compelled to act on insufficient information; unqualified Staffs improvised at the last moment; troops untrained to the conditions of open warfare asked to attack across the desert, or to assault trenches unsupported by the artillery or the trench mortars to which they had been accustomed in France: in short, we shall find that while making war we were learning war. That is, and always has been, a national characteristic—the natural corollary to our attitude towards military preparations in time of peace.

Even from the outline given in this chapter, however, we may glean a few outstanding points of which the significance is self evident. First, is the interdependence of strategy, tactics, and administration. Tactical and strategical plans failed because administration was not equal to moving and supplying troops, to preventing unnecessary physical suffering —which begets mistrust—and to maintaining morale. General Nixon, in deciding to stand at Kut, ignored the facts that his administrative services could not cope with the force required either to relieve Kut or to resume the offensive; that the Tigris Corps was short of land transport, heavy artillery and high-explosives, bridging material and medical comforts; that the army was short of river transport. As Sir William Robertson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, said, "... "the administrative situation was the determining factor."

Next, is the value of efficient staff work—the effective discharge of the responsibilities of the staff to the commander and the troops. In the Tigris Corps, staffs were improvised from among officers who had had no suitable training; there were constant changes in personnel; units arrived in the theatre of war in advance of the staffs of their formations. The consequence was that the Corps lacked cohesion, and its organisation suffered because, in order to avoid overloading Divisional staffs, too many units were retained under Corps control. Fresh to warfare, fresh to the East, taking over

duties about which they knew nothing, staffs could not "pull their weight," and they were so occupied in learning their duties that they had no time to look into the future. Even at Army Headquarters in India, the characteristics of the country and its climate and the special preparatory measures required to meet them were not appreciated. At General Headquarters in Mesopotamia, the commanders and staffs made a peculiarly "British" mistake—under-estimation of the enemy. Ctesiphon showed the true quality of the enemy's fresh troops, but in January General Younghusband's ability to go straight through them and up the river to Kut was not seriously questioned.

Finally, there is the question of luck. In soundly concieved operations, nothing should be left to luck, it is true. Yet it was not easy to foresee the abnormal rain and flood of the Spring of 1916, nor the physical and moral effect they would produce. In 1914 and most of 1915 luck had been with us, unquestionably. From Ctesiphon to the fall of Kut it was persistently against us.

CHAPTER VII.

The political and strategical situation at the surrender of Kut—The definition of British policy regarding the campaign—The strategical rôle of the Tigris Corps; withdrawal or not?—Factors affecting the strategic situation—C.I.G.S.'s instructions to General Lake—The situation on the Tigris in May—The situation on the Persian front and its effect upon British policy—The situation on the Tigris and on the Euphrates in June—The administrative problem—Proposals to resume the offensive—The administrative reorganisation—The change in command; General Maude appointed G.O.C.—The situation in Mesopotamia in September—The modification of the War Committee's defensive policy—Courses of action open to General Maude—The situation on the Tigris in September and October.

By the surrender of General Townshend and the 6th Division, the strategical defeat of the Expeditionary Force which had commenced at Ctesiphon was completed. The reverse was a severe one. The "strategic detachment" at Kut had become non-existent; the Tigris Corps, exhausted, disheartened—almost demoralised by failure and by disappointment, lay in its trenches in front of Sannaiyat deprived of its immediate objective. In India, it was anticipated that the fall of Kut would bring about serious results throughout the Middle East, although the advance of the Russian columns in north-west Persia—one was within a day's march of Teheran, another was approaching Qasr-i-Shirin and the Mesopotamian frontier at Khanikin, charged with a dual rôle of protecting the left of the Russian advance in the Caucasus and of co-operating with the operations of the Tigris Corps—had produced an improvement in the general situation in Persia.

At all events, the situation was anxiously reviewed by the War Committee—where it was realised that it was neither strategically desirable, nor possible, to reinforce General Lake because of the demands being made by other and more important theatres of war. It was decided, however, that he was to be kept adequately supplied with drafts and munitions in order to enable him to enforce the British policy. This the War Committee now declared to be :—

To uphold British influence in the Basra Vilayet; to protect the oil wells in Arabistan; to minimise the effect of the fall of Kut by "maintaining a bold front" on the Tigris and, by "containing" the Turkish Army Corps about Kut and Sannaiyat, to co-operate in the Russian advance in Persia,

where General Baratov had ten thousand cavalry, ten thousand infantry and thirty-eight guns.

The War Committee stated definitely that in Mesopotamia British policy was now strictly defensive, and that no special importance was attached either to the possession of Kut or to the occupation of Baghdad. Policy being thus clearly defined, how could strategy best give effect to it?

The Tigris Corps lay astride the Tigris opposite the Turkish defences at Sannaiyat and Es Sinn so exhausted by failure and by sickness as temporarily to be incapable of taking the offensive. The first point of strategy to be decided was whether the Corps should remain in its existing forward position or whether it should withdraw to one closer to the base. In coming to a decision, the administrative situation seemed to require the first consideration. Since January, matters had gone from bad to worse. Troops had been thrust into the country for the relief of Kut irrespective of the fact that neither the communications nor the available resources in war material were adequate to maintain them. Nor did there appear to be any likelihood of an early improvement in these respects because the Force was almost entirely dependent for supplies of river transport, material, and personnel—both technical and for unskilled labour—upon overseas sources; indeed, it seemed inevitable that the administrative situation must be worse before it could become better, because of the increased restriction imposed on navigation by the low summer-level of the river.

From an administrative standpoint, therefore, withdrawal had everything to recommend it. With shortened communications, the strain upon the transport service would be less, and the capacity of the transport would be increased—a condition of affairs which would make easier the concentration of reinforcements and the establishment of a forward reserve of supplies and munitions.

Strategically, too, withdrawal had much to recommend it. By occupying a defensive position nearer his base, *e.g.* the line Ahwaz-Amara-Nasiriyeh,* General Lake could shorten his communications and lessen the number of troops required for their protection, and could concentrate his army in one area to cover the lower reaches of the Tigris, the Euphrates and the Karun—the only lines of approach by which the Turks could advance against Basra and the oilfields. Finally, by falling back he could, to some extent, regain the strategic

* *Vide* Map No. 2.

initiative, because in so doing he would impose upon the enemy—should they decide to advance—all the disadvantages of moving and maintaining themselves by bad communications in order to attack a well-organised and concentrated defence.

However, these were not the only considerations to be taken into account. Co-operation with the Russian advance, and the upholding of British prestige had to be considered—both points having been specially referred to by the War Committee in their statement of policy. It was assumed that so long as the Tigris Corps remained in its forward position so long would the Turkish Commander regard it as a potential threat of advance—a menace in the face of which he would not risk withdrawing any of his force for transfer to the Persian front. In making this assumption, the ability of the enemy to appreciate the situation seems to have been underrated; however, for the moment it appeared as if by holding the forward position and by being ready to "take advantage" of any weakening of the enemy General Lake would be materially assisting General Baratov, the Russian Commander.

On the score of prestige, naturally it was argued that the effect of withdrawal would be disastrous, and—a point of more direct importance—the probable effect upon the lowered morale of General Gorringe's troops, whose retirement was certain to be followed up and harrassed by the tribes, was likely to be bad. Then, again, the health of the troops was bad and, until a very thorough reorganisation of medical services could be carried out, sickness was likely to be more prevalent in the lower reaches of the river than at a distance from the trying climate of the Persian Gulf. Finally, the Commander was reluctant to withdraw his force in the face of the enemy; and the mere idea of retreat threw the Government of India into a state of extreme apprehension.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Sir William Robertson, who carefully reviewed all the facts affecting the situation, was in favour of withdrawal. He gave way, however, to the strong representations of the Commander-in-Chief in India and the Commander in the field and instructed General Lake to the effect that he was to maintain his position as far forward as was tactically secure, that no more reinforcements could be sent to him, and that he had full authority to fall back at once should it become advisable. The Tigris Corps, therefore, remained where it was, and settled down to the monotony of trench warfare, a monotony

which, during the next few months, was to strain the fortitude of the troops as highly as anything they had yet endured. In a heat so scorching that men would climb out of the furnace-like trenches and risk a bullet in order to escape the baking walls; in a plague of flies; decimated by sickness; oppressed by endless dull fatigues, the emptiness of the desert, and, above all, the knowledge of failure and the sense of utter isolation from all familiar surroundings, British and Indian suffered side by side.

On the Tigris, the opposing armies lay in close contact. On the left bank, the Sannaiyat position—consisting of five lines of wired trenches—blocked the narrow defile which lay between the Suwaikiyeh Marsh and the river; behind Sannaiyat lay a series of prepared defences, stretching back to Kut itself—sixteen miles away.

On the right bank, the enemy held the general line Sinn Banks-Dujailah Redoubt-Atab, which commanded a great expanse of open desert. With his flanks secured against manœuvre, on the right by waterless desert and on the left by an impassable marsh, with his deep trenches and his fine field of fire, Khalil Pasha, the Turkish Commander, was well-placed—even had it been General Lake's intention to resume the offensive.

General Lake, however, was compelled to devote his whole energy to maintaining the Tigris Corps (some thirty thousand fighting men) in its forward position and in supplying the other scattered detachments of his army. For this task his resources were inadequate; the heat was intense and the sick-rate was appallingly high. Every fit man—and by "fit" is meant a man not sufficiently ill to "go sick"—was doing more than his own share of fatigues; consequently little or no training could be carried out. Short of trained men, short of transport, short of supplies, the condition of the Tigris Corps was lamentable.

Khalil Pasha was not slow to realise the situation. Kut had fallen; he appreciated that there was nothing to tempt General Gorringe to take action; and that so long as the Turkish position at Sannaiyat prevented the passage of the British supply-ships up the river and the Tigris Corps had insufficient transport to allow it to move far from these ships, it was practically impossible for the British to advance.

Meanwhile, in north-west Persia the Russian advance, was being greatly hindered by shortage of supplies and by difficult communications. Clearly, the moment was favourable for Khalil to put into execution the very plan

which General Lake was hoping to prevent by his continued occupation of the forward position—the transfer of Turkish troops from the Tigris trenches to engage the scattered Russian columns on the Persian front. For some time, General Baratov's advance towards Baghdad appears to have given the Turkish Commander considerable anxiety; now, realising General Gorringe's inability to take advantage of him, Khalil commenced to withdraw his cavalry and the 2nd Division from the right bank of the Tigris, and to send them with the 6th Division (XIII Corps) to the Persian front, leaving the XVII Corps* to hold the Sannaiyat position, the line of the left bank, and the line of the Hai on the right bank.

By the end of May he had established himself master of the strategical situation. He was containing General Gorringe by a force considerably smaller than the Tigris Corps—which now had an additional Division, the 14th, formed from the 35th, 36th and 37th Infantry Brigades—and had succeeded in concentrating in Persia about twenty thousand rifles, seventeen hundred sabres and fifty guns against General Baratov's nine thousand rifles, nine thousand sabres and thirty-seven guns. Moreover, he had superiority in the air.

Early in June, strategical success was crowned by tactical victory. The Turkish XIII Corps not merely checked the Russians, whose advance had culminated in a disorganised attack on Khanikin on June 1st, but defeated them so decisively and forced them back so vigorously that General Baratov hurriedly fell back upon Kerind reporting the enemy's strength as being five times his own.

This disaster to our Allies was at once seized upon in India as an occasion for renewing an offensive on the Tigris so as to create a diversion and to draw back the Turks from Persia. Superficially it looked as if in Mesopotamia there might be an opportunity for a counter stroke because in withdrawing the 2nd Division, the Turks had exposed the river-front of their left bank defences to an attack from the right bank. On May 19th an air reconnaissance reported the Turkish withdrawal on the right bank; it seemed that by crossing the river at, let us say, Magasis, General Gorringe could make a thrust in rear of the Sannaiyat position. Alternatively, it appeared feasible for him to advance on the right bank to the line of the Hai, to break

* The 35th Division was disbanded, XVIII Corps consisted of the 45th, 51st and 52nd Divisions.

through the weak garrison there and to advance to the Shumran bend with the object of getting astride the Turkish line of communication west of Kut.* On paper, and leaving out all practical considerations, these schemes looked attractive: in reality they were impossible. General Gorringe had neither sufficient bridging material to enable him to cross the swiftly-flowing river, nor enough heavy artillery to give adequate support to such a difficult tactical operation—which would have to be carried out in the face of determined opposition. An advance across the Hai was out of the question because the land transport of the Tigris Corps was quite insufficient to maintain even a small mobile force so far in advance of river-head and, had it been sufficient, the flooded area on the right bank west of the Hai would still have prevented movement there.

In practice, then, all that General Gorringe could do was slowly to move forward on the right bank to occupy as much of the evacuated Turkish positions as the administrative situation would allow him to maintain. This he did, and by June 9th, after advancing in intense heat and suffering considerably from lack of drinking water, the 3rd Division reached Imam, and was in occupation of a position from which the British heavy guns could reach the Hai—and even Kut. By the middle of June, the old Turkish positions at Magasis, Es Sinn, and Dujailah were in British occupation; behind them labour-companies were toiling away at the construction of the light railway which was to connect Sinn Abtar with the river-head at Sheikh Saad.*

On the Euphrates, although there appeared to be no likelihood of a hostile offensive, the tribal attitude about Nasiriyeh and Shattra gave cause for considerable anxiety, and the infantry brigade at Nasiriyeh had had to be increased to one division (the 15th, commanded by General Brooking). However, this division had accumulated a large reserve of supplies, and was well enough situated.

Elsewhere the administrative situation was bad. On the Tigris at Sheikh Saad, the advance base, the reserve of supplies was becoming dangerously low, and the average daily delivery in front of river-head was not sufficient to meet the demands for rations at full scale.

Meanwhile, the wastage of personnel was very seriously increasing. Between the 1st April and the 1st May, casualties

* *Vide* Maps No. 3 and 4.

from sickness and wounds amounted to fifty per cent of the effective strength of the Tigris Corps; the average fighting strength of divisions fell to six thousand four hundred, and the rate at which reinforcements could be brought up was only just sufficient to keep pace with the daily evacuation of casualties. At this time the "effective strength" of a battalion was the number of men who were not ill enough to be entirely useless. As the heat was becoming more and more intense and there was a shortage of sun-proof tents, sun-helmets and medical stores, it seemed as if the situation must deteriorate still further, and it was evident that the Director of Medical Services at G.H.Q. was not overstating the case when he reported:—"Unless conditions are improved, sick "wastage may increase considerably . . ." During the month of June, eleven thousand sick-casualties were evacuated to India (travelling down the Tigris and through the Persian Gulf in the red-hot summer); even then, there still remained in hospital in Mesopotamia sixteen thousand five hundred. Large numbers out of every reinforcement fell sick on, or directly after their arrival at the base; and of these a considerable percentage had to be evacuated from the theatre of war without having accomplished one hour's work in it.

It was impossible either to withdraw troops to rest, as was done on the Western Front, or to find a suitable place in which to rest them—everywhere conditions were equally bad. Short leave did not exist because there was nowhere to spend it: long leave (to India) was possible for only a very few—and for those the journey to Bombay or Karachi was not an unmixed blessing in the hot weather.

The transport situation was lamentable. During April, May, and June the number of ships on the river was augmented by only three vessels; there was a shortage of land-transport, vehicles were in bad repair, animals were on half rations. The amount of motor-transport with the force may be judged from the fact that in July General Lake's requirements amounted to six motor-transport companies, and one hundred and ten motor ambulances, as well as numerous touring cars, armoured cars, and motor cycles. At this time, every available vehicle with the Tigris Corps was in use, carting water, food, and stores across the fourteen miles of broken desert which lay between the river-head and the front line. In these circumstances it is not surprising to find that it was not until early in July that General Lake could report any improvement in the supply situation. By then he had a reserve of supplies in process of accumulation—although he was still

short of such essential items as oatmeal, condensed milk, and preserved vegetables, "of which there was scarcely any"—and fresh transport vehicles were beginning to arrive. Even by the end of August, however, the average daily delivery at the Tigris Corps was only four hundred and sixty tons, out of which three hundred and eighty tons consisted of essential supplies, leaving a very small margin of tonnage for tents, stores, railway material, and so forth.

Meanwhile, matters had been going so badly with General Baratov in Persia that, having been compelled to evacuate Kerind and to retire upon Kermanshah, he finally had been forced to withdraw, with great difficulty, as far as Bisitun.* Here he stood exhausted, quite unable to continue operations without a prolonged period of rest and reorganisation. His enemy was equally unable to take further action. In Persia, just as in Mesopotamia, the administrative situation compelled a halt, and early in July active operations on this front ceased for a time.

Nevertheless, in Persia Turkey had achieved a decided strategical and political success. By defeating General Baratov and driving him back to Bisitun, a serious menace to Baghdad and its communications with the XVIII Corps at Kut had been removed; effective co-operation between the Russians in Persia and the British on the Tigris had been prevented; and the road to Teheran had been opened to Turko-German enterprise. In India, this last point was regarded with grave apprehension. The possibility of a hostile advance into Persia roused all the fears of the Viceroy and his military advisers—so much so, indeed, that the Commander-in-Chief in July, reverted to his idea of carrying out an offensive on the Tigris as a "counter-irritant" to the situation in Persia.

However, as it was still impossible for the Tigris Corps to carry out more than a minor operation—and that only at the risk of a heavy increase of casualties from sickness—General Lake, after consultation with his subordinate commanders, decided that the only reasonable course of action was to continue to concentrate upon administrative reorganisation and to complete that before attempting to carry out an important tactical operation. The measures he had initiated were now beginning to show some result. His demands were now being met—slowly, it is true—from Imperial resources instead of from India alone; and men, arms and ammunition, equip-

* *Vide* Map No. 1.

ment, railway lines, engines and rolling stock, land and river transport were arriving week by week. To deal with this influx of personnel and material it had been necessary entirely to reconstruct the base port; and, round Basra, twenty miles of raised earthworks had been built in order to reclaim some fifty square miles of swamp and sluggish creek. On the reclaimed ground, reception-camps, hospitals, repair shops and storage dumps were erected; while at the port itself the river was being dredged, cranes were being set up, and wharves had been built. Both at the base and along the river banks roads were under construction; while in addition to the light railway in the forward area, two other railway lines were being laid down—one on the Euphrates communications from Basra to Nasiriyeh (for which General Nixon had asked in 1915), and the other on the Tigris communications between Qurna and Amara. When we consider what was being done at this time, we are compelled to realise that an "offensive" can be carried out in an administrative sense just as much as in a tactical sense. Although on the Tigris in the summer of 1916 the Tigris Corps lay inert, General Lake was pressing an administrative offensive which might make possible far-reaching strategical action. It was an offensive which was making very heavy demands upon the shipping and general resources of the Empire.

This "administrative offensive" was not sufficient to satisfy the Government of India, which was still very seriously troubled over the situation in Persia and in Mesopotamia. The Russian retirement had definitely ceased at Sultan Bulak, but the gap which now lay between General Baratov in Persia and General Lake in Mesopotamia was a large one. In the Caucasus the Russian left had become exposed to attack from Erzinjan. It seemed, therefore, that both in Persia and in the Caucasus the military situation would allow the enemy safely to withdraw troops from those fronts and to undertake an offensive in Mesopotamia. On August 25th in a long telegram to Sir William Robertson, the Commander-in-Chief in India represented this view and concluded by pressing for a British offensive to be carried out on the Tigris with a view to forestalling the Turks who, by attacking General Lake and forcing upon him either a stalemate or a withdrawal down the river could, he said, bring about the destruction of our prestige, the loss of the oilfields, the hostile penetration of Afghanistan and "the extension "of the war up to the frontiers of India."

Simultaneously with this alarming appreciation of the

situation by the Commander-in-Chief, General Lake reported that, owing to the rapid fall of the Tigris and the large number of mechanical breakdowns in his river transport, his supply situation had become so seriously compromised that he had been compelled to withdraw the 13th Division and certain Corps Troops from the forward area back to Amara, and that he might have to bring back still more.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff, who from the moment he had assumed responsibility for military policy in Mesopotamia, had realised that administration was the determining factor in the situation there, definitely informed the Commader-in-Chief in India that until the force in Mesopotamia was up to strength and efficient in every respect, there could be no question of resuming active operations. Also, he pointed out that, at the moment, the local strategical situation was reasonably satisfactory and that by the end of October, when the reorganisation would have been completed, the Tigris Corps would be strong enough to oppose with confidence any concentration which the enemy was likely to be able to bring against it.

At this point, the War Committee decided upon a change in the chief Command of Mesopotamia. General Lake was over sixty, and, though abnormally hard and fit for his years, he had been called on to support intense mental and physical strain. Apart from the acute responsibility thrust upon him on his arrival after the battle of Hanneh, apart from the tension of carrying out the relief operations to which he had found himself committed, he had spent the hottest season at his Headquarters at Basra—a very trying climate—or in travelling hundreds of miles, in extreme discomfort, inspecting troops and initiating reorganisation. One of the many strange misconceptions about this campaign is the misappreciation of the value of the work carried out by General Lake. Strategically he had not been successful, it is true, but in his efforts to relieve Kut his hands had been tied—he had been presented with a *fait accompli* on his arrival in the country—but from the first he had seen the essential need for a complete reorganisation of the administrative machinery, and at once he had set about initiating the necessary improvements. The measures which he planned could not take effect for weeks—even months—nor was it until after he had relinquished command that the Expedition fully benefitted from the work which he had begun. Its value is shown clearly by the words of his successor, General Maude, who in his first despatch says how much

he owed to the measures "so carefully designed and "developed by my predecessor, to whom my warm thanks are "due for the firm foundations which had been laid for the "ensuing winter campaign."

Lieutenant-General Sir S. F. Maude assumed command of the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force on August 28th, 1916. Before the Great War he—a keen, well-read soldier, and a Staff College graduate—had held important staff appointments in peace and had seen war service in Egypt and South Africa. In 1914 he was given a first grade general staff appointment with the III Corps, and subsequently commanded successively the 14th Infantry Brigade and the 33rd Division in France; the 13th Division at Gallipoli, and in Mesopotamia. His strong, compelling personality; his unlimited capacity for work; his comprehensive grasp of detail, and his wide knowledge of every branch of staff work fitted him alike for staff or command

Although he had had no previous experience of the East and its peculiar problems, on his arrival with the 13th Division in Mesopotamia he soon grasped the essential difficulties of the campaign, of which he said, "... it is a campaign so full "of difficulties and complications as can hardly be realised at "home." The brilliant achievements of his Division in the last phase of the relief operations, and his pre-eminence as a leader soon singled him out, and although he was the junior Divisional Commander in the Tigris Corps, his appointment as Corps Commander, in succession to General Gorringe, was universally approved. As G.O.C. Tigris Corps he was in closest touch with General Lake, and keenly appreciated his difficulties, which he realised at once to be chiefly due to defective administration. On assuming command—which he did at the personal intervention of Sir William Robertson on his behalf—he determined to complete the reorganisation of the whole Expedition before undertaking anything else.

He had an abnormal power of concentration, and this, together with the facts that in Mesopotamia there was a shortage of adequately trained staff officers, and that the climate was apt to induce mental lethargy, led him to centralise control to an unusual degree.

Actually, at the moment at which he took up the reins the administrative situation was showing distinct improvement, although it was not yet sufficiently good to allow him to undertake any offensive operation. For the time, therefore, the strategical initiative rested with the enemy, who it was thought might be concentrating troops from Persia and

the Caucasus for an enterprise in Mesopotamia. It was improbable that the concentration could take place until the winter, when the Russians in the Caucasus and in North West Persia would be immobilised by the snow, but the courses which were open to the enemy had to be carefully considered. It was possible for the Turks either to attack General Maude's force in Mesopotamia while containing the Russians in Persia, or, alternatively, to hold up General Maude on the Tigris while making an advance into the heart of Persia, towards Afghanistan and India. Of the two alternatives, an offensive against the British in Mesopotamia seemed to promise less costly and more certain results than an advance into Persia, which from a military standpoint offered poor opportunities for exploitation. There was no actual indication that the enemy intended to carry out any operation on such a scale, but the contingency was one which had to be taken into account.

If the enemy decided upon an offensive in Mesopotamia, it was open to him either to attack the Tigris Corps with the object of driving it down the river, or of pinning it to its ground, with the object of advancing on Basra by way of the Euphrates.

In this strategical situation one point, at least was clear—by remaining inert on the Tigris General Maude would surrender every vestige of strategical initiative. The question he had to ask himself was, would it not be better to move—to advance or to retreat—instead of "staying put" to await attack.

The policy of His Majesty's Government was strictly defensive; it had been specifically stated that no importance was attached to the capture of Kut or to the occupation of Baghdad. This policy could be enforced at least as effectively from Amara as from Sannaiyat. As we have seen in considering this question previously, strategically, tactically and administratively, the balance of argument was on the side of withdrawal—that is, so long as policy remained consistent.

But policy did not remain consistent. In India, apprehensions about the attitude of Persia and Afghanistan and anxieties over the extension of the war eastwards, racked the political and military headquarters. Swayed by the Viceroy's representations, and anxious for any success, the War Committee began to waver towards a semi-offensive policy of attacking the Turks and defeating them in detail on the Tigris before they could concentrate for an offensive. It was felt that such a movement would appear to have the

capture of Baghdad as its object, and therefore would help British prestige.

The chief of the Imperial General Staff informed the War Committee that in October General Maude's effective strength on the Tigris would be approximately fifty-three thousand infantry, four thousand six hundred cavalry (another Cavalry Brigade, the 7th, had been sent from France) and two hundred and twenty eight guns, and that the General Staff was of the opinion that it was possible for the Turks to concentrate and maintain not more than sixty thousand troops on the Tigris. Sir William Robertson, in his appreciation of the situation, said that the then-existing dispositions of the Tigris Corps did not appreciably affect the situation in Persia, and that even the occupation of Baghdad would have no decisive effect upon war as a whole. He added that if our policy was strictly defensive, then withdrawal was the soundest and most economical course, but that if our policy was offensive, then the additional expenditure of military resources which would be required to enable General Maude to enforce it would be disproportionate to the political and military advantages which could be gained by the change—saying "Anything is better than continuing our present difficult, "costly and objectiveless plan." He strongly urged a reversion to the original defensive policy because, he said, we could not afford to keep a hundred thousand men in Mesopotamia holding up forty thousand Turks. The force was too small for an offensive and too large for the defensive. Nevertheless, although their responsible military adviser had expressed himself thus, on September 28th the War Committee modified the previous instructions which had defined the scope of the operations. On that day, General Maude was informed by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff that "it is the intention of H.M.G. if and when possible to "establish British influence in the Baghdad Vilayet," and that he was to continue to improve his communications and to keep his force as far forward as could be done with safety. Sir William Robertson at the War Committee reiterated his opinion that the occupation of Baghdad could have no decisive effect upon the Great War, and that the military risk incurred by a further diversion of resources from the decisive theatre of war—the Western Front—was considerable.

Whatever "the intention of H.M.G.," it was indisputable that General Maude could undertake no advance until the reorganisation of his army was completed. Naturally, both General Maude and the Commander-in-Chief in India were

in favour of continuing to occupy the forward position, which they considered necessary for carrying out the policy now laid down, and for upholding British prestige. Moreover, General Maude felt that in the new circumstances, withdrawal to Amara would effect no economy. Now that it had been decided that, at any rate, there was no question of withdrawal on the Tigris, there were open to him two main alternatives—to carry out an offensive on the Euphrates, or to carry out an offensive on the Tigris. On the Euphrates there were no formed bodies of the enemy within fifty miles of General Brooking's division at Nasiriyeh; it was unsuitable as a line of advance upon Baghdad, and the only immediate military objective was the small town of Samawah, which the enemy could use as a supply centre and possibly as an advanced base for an offensive. On the Tigris, the immediate objective of an offensive must be the enemy's field army. Defeat here would compel the enemy to bring reinforcements from Persia to stem the British advance towards Baghdad, and would allow General Baratov an opportunity of once more advancing on the city, which thus would again become the focus of Allied operations in the Middle East. At the end of August, the Russian Commander in the Caucasus had foretold a renewal of the offensive there—directed towards Mosul—and in Persia, and further information of reinforcements being sent to General Baratov now arrived.

The problem with which General Maude was faced on the Tigris was an interesting one. Strategically he held the advantage. The front on which the enemy could be brought to battle extended from the impassable Suwaikiyeh Marsh along the front of Sannaiyat to the Tigris, along its left bank to Kut, thence from a point on the right bank three miles north east of Kut to the Hai, two miles below its exit from the Tigris, and thence along the line of the Hai.* Except for certain Turkish posts (which could be reinforced only by ferry from across the river) the right bank as far as the Hai was clear of the enemy, so that the whole of the river front on the left bank and the Turkish communications lay open to attack from the south. It seemed, therefore, that by advancing westwards along the right bank and clearing it of the enemy, it would be possible to manœuvre against the flank of the Sannaiyat position and the enemy's rear and communications. General Maude's communications, on the

* *Vide* Maps No. 3 and 4.

other hand, were secure, because on the left bank they could be reached by the enemy only after a long and difficult detour round the Suwaikiyeh Marsh, while on the right bank the absence of drinking water in the desert made any attempt to outflank the British left practically impossible.

Whichever alternative might be selected, there was an essential strategical preliminary movement to be carried out: this was the capture of the line of the river Hai. The Hai was not navigable except during the high-water season, and then for only a small part of its length, but there were suspicions at General Maude's Headquarters that the Turks had a scheme to divert the waters of the Tigris into it in order to convert it into a possible line of communication for the transfer of troops from the Tigris to the Euphrates. This would enable the enemy to move against the flank of a British advance on Samawah. What was of more practical importance in the possession of the Hai was that it would enable General Maude to exercise control over the supplies which could be drawn from the fertile districts on its banks and to dominate the Shattra tribes, which numbered about thirty thousand armed men, and were capable of seriously interfering with the flank and communications of an advance along either the Tigris or Euphrates.

Throughout October and November the general condition of the Force improved by leaps and bounds. In October, General Sir Charles Munro visited Mesopotamia on his way to India, where he was taking up his appointment as Commander-in-Chief, and, after a very thorough inspection and a very comprehensive discussion with General Maude, he reported most favourably on the general situation. In morale and fighting efficiency the troops left little to be desired: administratively, too, a great improvement was perceptible, and this was being steadily maintained. At the end of November, the light railway between Sheikh Saad and Sinn Abtar was working, and the lines between Qurna and Amara, and Basra and Nasiriyeh were reaching completion. The working capacity of these two lines respectively was five thousand and one thousand tons a week, and that capacity would increase as soon as more railway material arrived from India. The river-transport, too, had been very considerably augmented and now was sufficient to ensure a steady flow of troops and material to the front. The 7th Cavalry Brigade had arrived; additional Artillery units, Lewis guns, enough

machine guns for fifteen new machine-gun companies, and five companies of motor transport were available in the country. The ration strength of the army now amounted to sixty-four thousand eight hundred British, and one hundred and fifty-six thousand Indian personnel, together with seventy-three thousand animals.

As his final step in reorganisation, General Maude reconstituted the Tigris Corps. As it had previously existed, it was a clumsy organisation—consisting of four divisions of infantry, two brigades of cavalry and other Corps troops—which had been forced on General Lake by circumstances. The shortage of trained staffs, and the piecemeal arrival of units in the early months of 1916, had led to over-centralisation of control, but now General Maude broke up the unwieldy formation. The troops on the Tigris, of course, formed by far the largest portion of the Force, and it was clear that this force should be directed by the G.O.C. in Chief. While administrative reorganisation had been the principal interest, G.H.Q. had done well to remain at Basra; now that a resumption of tactical operations seemed likely it was essential that the G.O.C. should take effective control of them. With the object of assuming this control, and of gaining flexibility in operating, General Maude reconstituted the Tigris Corps into the I and III Army Corps, and on the 15th November the Force became reorganised—as is shown in the Order of Battle given in Appendix C.

It was necessary to arrive at a definite policy for the provision of land transport for this force, because it was obviously uneconomical to maintain at the front the vast number of transport animals required to keep the *whole* force mobile, of which perhaps a large proportion would not be required. After discussion with General Maude, General Munro recommended that the transport should be sufficient to allow the force to follow up the Turks, should they withdraw; to enable the despatch of columns from both rivers to protect the flanks of the armies, and to take action against local riverian tribes, and in the oilfields district. In effect, these proposals resulted in an establishment of land transport sufficient to equip the whole force with first and second line; to provide supply columns carrying one day's supplies for two brigades of cavalry and five divisions of infantry, and to allow a column of two brigades of infantry and one of artillery to operate for three days from the river-head on the Tigris. Another most important addition to the

force was extra bridging-equipment; and to army troops was added a mobile unit carrying enough material to build five hundred yards of bridge.

The Turkish XVIII Army Corps (45th, 51st, 52nd Divisions) were still occupying the seemingly impregnable defences of Sannaiyat and the entrenched positions behind them; the river front as far as Kut; thence from a point three miles north-east of the town to the Hai, two miles below its exit from the Tigris; thence to the north-west towards Shumran.* Of the right-bank portion of this front, the enemy's strong points were his defences at the Khadairi Bend, and at the Hai Salient (which formed a bridge-head to the pontoon bridge across the Hai opposite Kut and covered the approaches to Shumran—where there was a boat-bridge across the Tigris—from the east). For several miles below the Hai Salient, the line of the river Hai was garrisoned by weak posts of infantry and watched by mounted Arab Irregulars. In all, the hostile forces on the Tigris were estimated at seven hundred cavalry, about twenty thousand rifles and seventy guns. In Persia, the XIII Corps was thought to be about seventeen thousand rifles and fifty guns, opposing the Russian force of seven thousand cavalry and sixteen thousand infantry; at Baghdad there were some four or five thousand rifles; and on the Euphrates there were scattered detachments amounting to approximately two thousand rifles and eight guns.

From a glance at Maps No. 3 and 4, it will be seen that while on the left bank of the Tigris General Maude's front lay within a hundred and twenty yards of Sannaiyat, on the right bank his advanced posts—only two miles from the line of the Turks at Khadairi Bend and five miles from the line of the Hai—were eleven miles up-stream of that point.

The strength of the two armies on the Tigris was:—Turkish, on the left bank, about seventeen thousand five hundred infantry and fifty-five guns; on the right bank about two thousand five hundred rifles and fifteen guns. British, three thousand five hundred cavalry, forty-five thousand rifles and a hundred and seventy-four guns.

By the beginning of December, General Maude had a distinct advantage over the enemy, not only in numbers, in organisation and in efficiency, but also because on the right bank he had the opportunity to manœuvre against the left

* *Vide* Maps No. 3 and 4.

bank defences. Up to the limits imposed by the capacity of his land transport and the presence of the enemy at the Khadairi Bend and at the Hai Salient—small, but strong positions which could be supported by enfilade fire from the left bank—he could use his mobility to enable him to operate against the flank, rear, and communications of the defences which lay between Sannaiyat and Kut. There were two other limiting factors in the situation:—the weather, which in December was liable to be wet and therefore might seriously impede the movements of troops and transport for days together; and the essential need for avoiding heavy casualties and for economy in the expenditure of resources. These points were specially impressed upon General Maude by Sir William Robertson, who laid down twenty-five per cent. of effectives as being the limit of casualties which could be risked in any operation in Mesopotamia.

In considering his plan for an offensive, General Maude had no very definite policy to assist him. "To establish "British influence in the Baghdad Vilayet" might mean much or little. One thing was certain; that the enemy in front of him was his immediate objective—and with the strategical situation as it was, that his objective could be gained more effectively on the Tigris than on the Euphrates.

To bring the enemy to battle on the Tigris there were three main courses open to him. He could attack the defences of Sannaiyat, frontally, as had been done so disastrously in April, or in flank from across the river; he could attempt to draw the enemy out of Sannaiyat by advancing on the right bank and threatening his rear and his communications, or he could combine these two courses and operate simultaneously on both banks. Of these alternatives the first two must inevitably result in heavy casualties. The British heavy artillery was not sufficiently powerful to crush the strong defensive works at Sanniayat, or to ensure success in such a dangerous tactical operation as crossing a wide, deep, fast-flowing river in the face of well-prepared and determined opposition. On the other hand, while by manœuvring on the right bank it might be possible to frighten the enemy out of his defences it would not prevent him from withdrawing from them in good order and retiring to occupy other strong positions in rear—in other words, it would not necessarily bring him to a decisive battle.

By combining these plans, that is by pinning the enemy to the left bank position by constant fear of attack on Sannaiyat, and at the same time manœuvring on the right bank

to strike at his flank or communications, decisive results might be achieved. In engaging the enemy at the two extremes of his attenuated line, at Sannaiyat and, let us say, Shumran, General Maude would be compelling him either to concentrate at whichever extreme he considered the more vital, or to disperse his forces in an attempt to hold the whole front—which was far too great for the troops he had available.

On the British side by this time, General Maude's numbers were sufficient to allow him to contemplate operating on both banks although his mobility was somewhat limited by the Turkish occupation of Sannaiyat. So long as Sannaiyat barred the river to the forward movement of his supply ships, General Maude was dependent on land transport for maintaining any movement in advance of Sheikh Saad, and his land transport was not sufficient to allow him to move either very rapidly or with a very extended radius of action.

Taking these factors into consideration, it is clear that the only strategical plan which would be administratively sound was to operate in a series of limited phases—the limitations being imposed by the need for continuous and complete tactical and administrative security. The object of the plan was a limited one—it was a plan for defeating the enemy, not a plan for the capture of Baghdad. As we have seen, General Maude considered an advance to the river Hai to be an essential preliminary to any bigger operation, whether on the Tigris or the Euphrates, and on his reporting to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff that his force was ready to resume active operations he received permission to undertake this preliminary enterprise at his own discretion.

Until this moment General Maude had preserved the strictest secrecy with regard to his intentions, which he had disclosed to neither his own Staff nor his Corps Commanders, and which he had carefully refrained from communicating to the Russian Commander in Persia, who was making enquiries with a view to co-operating in any British operation.

On the 10th December, he issued orders for an advance to the Hai. The offensive was about to begin.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BRITISH OFFENSIVE ON THE TIGRIS.

Final preparations for the offensive—The first phase: The line of the Hai gained and consolidated; General Maude's redistribution of his forces in order to form a mobile striking force: The operation at the Shumran Bend; The situation at the close of the first phase—Courses of action open to General Maude—The second phase: The attack on the Khadairi position by the 1st Corps meets with unexpectedly strong resistance; The action of the 3rd Corps; The situation at the end of the second phase—The third phase: operations at the Hai Salient—The fourth phase; operations at the Dahra Bend—The Turks lose the whole of the right bank of the Tigris.

Early in December the training-camps at Amara were broken up and the troops were moved forward to their concentration areas. On the 8th and 9th rain fell; in consequence, the preparations were somewhat delayed, and it was not until the 10th that the final dispositions were completed. On the 10th the 1st Corps (3rd and 7th Divisions) was facing Sannaiyat on the left bank and was in occupation of the right bank as far west as the line Arab Village—Twin Canals—Sin Abtar—Dujailah Redoubt. West of the line Sinn Banks—Dujailah Redoubt the 3rd Corps (13th and 14th Divisions) was ready to begin operations; at Arab Village the 6th and 7th Cavalry Brigades (temporarily organised as a Cavalry Division) were waiting to move forward.

On the 10th General Maude issued his orders for the forthcoming operation. His plan was to surprise the enemy by moving at night and to push forward on the right bank to capture the line of the river Hai.* The forward movement was to take place on the night of 13/14th December. On the 13th, the artillery of both Corps was to pin the enemy to the left bank by bombardment and the 1st Corps was to create the impression that an attack upon Sannaiyat was impending. On the right bank during the night 13/14th, the Cavalry Division was to march to secure a crossing over the Hai at Basrugiyah before daybreak on the 14th, and afterwards to move rapidly towards the Turkish bridge at the Shumran bend, pushing the enemy back along the western

* *Vide* Maps No. 3 and 4.

bank of the Hai south of Kala Haji Fahan : the Flying Corps was to bomb the Shumran bridge. On the 14th, on the left bank, the 1st Corps was to continue to bombard Sannaiyat and was to be ready to assault the position if ordered to do so by General Maude; on the right bank the 3rd Corps was to advance to the Hai and to operate in a north-westerly direction to clear the east bank of the Hai south of Kala Haji Fahan; in addition, it was to be prepared to clear the enemy from the right bank of the Tigris between Sinn Banks and the Hai, should the opportunity offer itself, and to secure its flank and rear from Arab incursions. The Royal Flying Corps was to carry out reconnaissance and artillery co-operation duties.

This plan was carried out successfully. The enemy was completely surprised by the night-march of the Cavalry Division, which reached Basrugiyah at 0600 hours on the 14th, and by the advance of the 40th Infantry Brigade (3rd Corps) which reached Atab at 0545 hours. During the day, the 3rd Corps pushed forward. By nightfall it had established touch with the enemy's defences at the Khadairi Bend and at the Hai Salient, while the Cavalry Division had reached Kala Haji Fahan, moved out towards Shumran and had withdrawn again to bivouac at Atab. The whole operation was then completed by linking up the old British front line with the new, and by occupying the old Turkish trenches which ran west from the Dujailah Redoubt, in order to secure the right and left flanks of the 3rd Corps advance.

All this was accomplished at the cost of only five hundred casualties. That night, 14/15th December, the Turks dismantled the Shumran bridge and began to tow it up-stream but, under a heavy and continuous bombardment from the air, the tows broke away, with the result that for the next three days the enemy was without communication by bridge across the Tigris.

On the 15th, the 3rd Corps and the Cavalry Division continued operations and gained the information that the defences at Khadairi and at the Hai Salient were strongly held, but during the 15th, 16th, and 17th, little ground was gained. However, by the 18th, the 3rd Corps had reached the line Immam al Mansur—Atab—Kala Haji Fahan and had consolidated its gains; the Sannaiyat, Kut, and Hai Salient defences had been heavily bombarded; six bridges had been built across the Hai, and the extension of the light railway from Sinn Aftar to Atab had been begun.

By these operations General Maude secured a firm hold on

a position which was within seven miles of the point—west of Kut—where the enemy's line of communications joined his battle front; consequently, he found himself in a position to attempt a blow against those communications. With this intention he made a re-distribution of his troops. Already the 1st Corps had relieved the 3rd Corps of part of its responsibility on the right bank by taking over the river front as far west as Magasis; now the 3rd Corps was still further freed by the G.O.C. Tigris Defences taking over the right bank as far as Immam al Mansur and the Dujailah Redoubt—Hai trenches. In consequence, by midnight on the night 19/20th December the 3rd Corps had re-adjusted its distribution so that the 13th Division was occupying a position astride the Hai facing north, one brigade of the 14th Division was facing west and south between the left of the 13th Division and the Atab Bridge-head, while two miles west of Besouia one brigade from the 13th Division and two from the 14th Division were concentrated for use as a striking force, together with five batteries of artillery, some cavalry, some engineers and the mobile bridging-train.

With this striking force and with the Cavalry Division, General Maude had the means to manœuvre on the right bank. Organising the whole of these mobile troops into two columns, he ordered the first to move out to the southern end of the Husaini bend and there to gain a crossing over the Tigris and to establish bridge-head positions on both banks of the river, while the second was to shell the enemy's bridge (which had now been re-established on the west side of the Shumran peninsula) and to cover the withdrawal of the second-line transport of the first column, which was to dump all its stores, pontoons and bridging equipment at Husaini bend.

The operation was attempted on the 20th December, but it was abandoned without being pressed to a conclusion. Had it been successful, it would have forced the Turks to disperse their strength to meet a threat from an entirely new direction, and might even have caused them to evacuate Sannaiyat or Kut. As it was, the enemy was found to be in strength on the left bank, and from the initial failure to launch a pontoon it was seen that any attempt to force a crossing in the face of organised opposition must prove very costly: the columns, therefore, withdrew. The operation was indirectly of value, probably, because in demonstrating the tactical difficulty of forcing a crossing over the

Tigris it lulled the Turks into a false sense of security with regard to the impregnability of their position across the river.

Meanwhile, on the right bank, the 1st and 3rd Corps went on consolidating their positions and slowly advancing their trenches towards the defences at Khadairi and the eastern face of the Hai Salient. By the 25th the British line was established on the river bank opposite Kut between the Khadairi Bend and the Salient, where the flanks of the 1st and 3rd Corps met.

This may be regarded as the close of the first phase in the offensive, because on the 26th the weather broke, heavy rain fell, troops, guns, transport, and railway-trains became almost immobilised, and operations came to a standstill.

It will be remembered that General Maude had planned no further ahead than to establish himself on the Hai at the cost of as few casualities as possible. He had set about the task with deliberate caution, and now found himself in unchallenged occupation of his objective at the expenditure of about seven hundred and fifty casualties, while his administrative services were fully equal to maintaining his troops in their new positions.

The question was, whether he should rest content with the accomplishment of his original intention or whether he should press the operations on the Tigris to a decision; and the deciding factor was, whether the cost of forcing a decision would be proportionate to the success he would be likely to gain. It was still open to him to carry out operations either on the Euphrates or on the Tigris, and—not wishing to commit himself irrevocably in either direction—his plan of action for the immediate future was thoroughly to consolidate his position on the Hai to meet a possible counter-offensive by a reinforced enemy; to try entirely to clear the right bank of the enemy, and then either to advance on the Euphrates to Samawah or to seize a favourable opportunity for attacking a weak spot in the enemy's Tigris army, which lay stretched out between Sannaiyat and Shumran.

With this proposal Sir William Robertson was in agreement, but he warned General Maude that it would probably become necessary to take from him his British Division—the 13th—in response to the demands of the military situation elsewhere, and that it was, therefore, more than ever important that the consolidation of his present success should be completed rapidly and effectively.

Between the 26th December and the 6th January rain fell heavily. The whole country turned into a sea of mud; oper-

ations became impossible, the maintenance of the troops was considerably impeded—in fact, the situation formed a useful object-lesson to those who had visualised a rapid forward rush.

At the commencement of the second phase in his operations, General Maude conceived the enemy's dispositions to be as follows:—9 battalions, 19 guns and 6 trench mortars at Sannaiyat; 3 battalions and 12 guns between Sannaiyat and Kut; 6 battalions, 21 guns and 4 trench mortars at Kut, the Khadairi bend and the Hai Salient; 6 battalions and 8 guns astride the river at Shumran; and 3 battalions, 3 squadrons and 6 guns between the Shumran bend and Bugailah—a total of 27 battalions, 72 guns, and 10 trench mortars (approximately 300 sabres and 18,700 rifles). Accurate intelligence of the enemy's Order of Battle was not easy to obtain, because the Turks were constantly changing the regiments in formations; also there were mutually conflicting reports from various sources with regard to the formation of another Turkish Army Corps (the III) which—it was thought—was intended to reinforce the enemy on the Tigris. However, early in January, General Baratov in Persia ascertained by carrying out operations on his whole front that the enemy had not withdrawn any troops from there.

At this time the authorised establishment of Force D was 120,472 combatants and 83,028 "followers";* therefore, General Maude had sufficient superiority in numbers to allow him to regard the situation with equanimity. As the bulk of his force on the right bank depended upon the light railway for maintenance and the likelihood of the recurrence of wet weather handicapped his ability to operate far in front of his advanced railhead, he determined to concentrate on clearing the enemy from the Khadairi and Hai Salient positions—a measure which would secure for him complete freedom of manœuvre and immunity against an effective counter-offensive on the right bank. The first step was to capture the Turkish position at Khadairi—where the three lines of defences were well-sited and strong—from which the enemy could reach the British communications with the Hai as well as being able to let flood-water into portions of the British trenches as soon as the river should rise. In spite of the wet weather during the

* The ration-strength was approximately 250,000, including sick, reliefs, local labour, etc.

last week in December, the 3rd Division (8th and 9th Infantry Brigades) had succeeded in gaining close contact with the Khadairi position, of which the flanks rested on the river and the front was covered by cross-fire from positions on the left bank. On the 6th January, 1917, by which time the rain had ceased and movement had become possible, General Maude issued orders for operations by the 1st Corps against Khadairi, a demonstration by the 3rd Corps against the Hai Salient and the Shumran bend, and a raid against Bugailah by the Cavalry Division.* Actually, thick mist which lasted from daybreak till 1500 hours on the 9th, caused the operations against Bughaila and Shumran to be cancelled, but the attack on the Khadairi position was carried out.

In front of the defences, the flat open desert afforded the enemy an excellent field of fire, and the attack met with an opposition which was surprisingly resolute. The Turkish artillery fire was accurate and intense, the counter-attacks were vigorous, and the defenders reinforced the right bank position by ferrying troops across from the left bank. Consequently, it was not until the night 18th/19th January that the Turks, realising the hopelessness of further resistance, evacuated the last line of their defences and withdrew across the river. For ten days they put up an heroic struggle and inflicted and received heavy casualties in fighting which was severe and mainly hand-to-hand. Indeed, the obstinacy of their resistance caused the 3rd Division 1,639 casualties. During the operations, the Cavalry Division moved down the east bank of the Hai to Hai town to ascertain what local supplies were procurable, and had a brush with the Arabs on withdrawing.

Meanwhile, information was received to the effect that the enemy was likely to be strongly reinforced towards the end of January and intended to assume a counter-offensive either against General Maude's front or against his communications on the left bank from the north. However, General Maude's general superiority in strength, and in particular his superiority in mobile troops and in the air, enabled him to view both contingencies without anxiety. He estimated that he was opposed by thirty battalions, and that the enemy might reinforce his Tigris front by two divisions (from Rowanduz and Hamadan) or even more, but he felt confident to deal with any likely hostile action on either the Tigris or the Euphrates.

* *Vide* Official History, Vol. III, pp. 94, 95.

The capture of the Khadairi position may be taken as the end of the second phase—one which was a distinct step in General Maude's slow, methodical progress: he had driven the enemy from one stronghold on the right bank; he had carefully consolidated his gains; he had secured himself on the Hai against any counter-offensive the enemy could bring against him. The next step to be undertaken was the capture of the Hai Salient.

While the 1st Corps, under General Cobbe, was operating against the Khadairi bend, the 3rd Corps, under General Marshall, was preparing to attack the Hai Salient. At the beginning of the second phase, on January 9th, the 3rd Corps line extended from the right bank of the Tigris immediately south-east of Kut, in a south-westerly direction to the Hai—which was by now a wide deep stream—at Kala Haji Fahan, and thence a mile to the west, afterwards bending back southwards parallel with the river. During the first few days of the Khadairi operations, little could be done by General Marshall because a large proportion of his artillery was engaged in supporting the attack of the 1st Corps, and it was not until after the Turks had been driven out of the Khadairi bend that the 3rd Corps was able to resume activity.

On the 20th January, General Maude issued an operation order* for the attack on the Hai salient, which we may regard as the third phase in the offensive. He estimated the strength of the enemy in front and on the left of the 3rd Corps as being 300 sabres, 51 guns, and 11,800 rifles. The enemy's dispositions were thought to be as follows:—

At the Hai salient: east bank 3 battalions; west bank 4 guns and 3 battalions; between Hai salient and Shumran, 5 battalions; between Shumran and Bughaila 210 sabres, 6 guns and 2 battalions; in general reserve at Dahra 60 sabres, 12 guns and 4 battalions.

The plan of operations was that the 3rd Corps should capture the salient defences on both sides of the Hai; the 1st Corps should make diversions on its front on the right bank, and the Cavalry Division should cross to the left bank at Arab Village and move round the north of the Suwaikiya marsh to divert the enemy's attention from the operations of the 3rd Corps. On the 22nd heavy rain fell, which caused some delay in the programme and necessitated abandoning the enterprise for the Cavalry Division, but by the

* *Vide* Official History, Vol. III, pp. 108, 109.

23rd the weather was improving, and there seemed promise of a dry spell.

At the opening of the third phase, the 3rd Corps right was in touch with the left of the 1st Corps on the right bank of the Tigris immediately south-east of Kut. Its divisions were disposed as follows:—The 13th Division was facing the eastern and southern faces of the Hai salient between the river and a point just west of the Hai; on its left, two brigades of the 14th Division continued the line to a point about a mile and a half west by south of Kala Haji Fahan, while the third Infantry Brigade was concentrated near Besouia. To the south and west of this point the flank and rear were protected by one infantry brigade allotted from the 1st Corps.

The 3rd Corps plan for capturing the Hai Salient was to assault the southern portion of the defences astride the Hai on a two-brigade front, supported by an intense artillery bombardment.

At 0940 hours on the 25th January, the 40th and 39th Brigades of the 13th Division advanced to the attack on respectively the east and west banks of the Hai and, under cover of the bombardment, penetrated the first line of the defence. The fighting was severe and, on the west bank, the enemy counter-attacked with so great determination that by 1600 hours the 39th Brigade, which suffered severe casualties, had been forced back to its starting-line. Owing to the heavy casualties and the congestion in the communication trenches, it was unable to resume the offensive that day. East of the Hai, the 40th Brigade established itself in the second line of the defences and by nightfall had succeeded in consolidating its gains in spite of two determined counter-attacks. It was a day of heavy fighting: the British casualties totalled 1,135, and the enemy's losses were far heavier.

The next morning, the G.O.C. 14th Division (General Egerton), who was in command of the troops west of the Hai, resumed the attack on the west bank. By nightfall, after severe fighting he had made some progress. East of the Hai the 40th Brigade extended its front eastwards.

Between the 27th and the 30th, the 3rd Corps continued slowly to gain ground on both banks of the Hai, consolidating the new positions as they were gained, and moving the guns forward to support the next attack.

On the 31st, General Maude, after consultation with the

G.O.C. 3rd Corps, issued orders* for further progress to be made "in driving the enemy from the trenches ... on both "banks of the Hai..." In outline, his plan was for the 3rd Corps (with one Brigade of 1st Corps temporarily attached to it) to carry out an assault on the Hai, while the Cavalry Division was to co-operate in the attack on its open left flank (which had had to be carefully protected from Arab attacks during the whole of the operations) to the westward. The G.O.C. 3rd Corps (General Marshall) decided to make this assault with a division on each bank of the Hai supported by the 3rd Corps Artillery.

On the 1st February, the operation began. On the east bank it met with signal success. During the day, the 13th Division, at the cost of very slight casualties, captured the whole of the defences—excepting the last line of trenches—between the Tigris and the Hai. On the west bank, however, it was not so successful. The initial assault of the 14th Division reached the enemy's first line, but by 1330 hours the attackers were driven out by a fierce counter-attack and were forced back to their starting-line with very heavy losses.† Communication-trenches (which had not been fully completed in their preparation) became very congested, and for the rest of the day attempts to organise a fresh attack failed.

During the night, General Marshall withdrew the 13th Division from the east bank (relieving it by the Infantry Brigade lent to him by the 1st Corps) in order to transfer it to the left of the 14th Division and to extend the front of attack on the west bank. On the 2nd February, owing to a heavy mist, it was thought inadvisable to resume operations, but on the 3rd the 14th Division again assaulted the defences west of the Hai. During the previous night the 13th Division had extended a line of piquets north-westwards towards the Tigris to enclose the Turks in the Dahra bend. Under the heavy artillery barrage which was arranged to protect the left flank of the assault from enfilade fire, the 14th Division advanced, and succeeded in carrying the two lines of trenches which were its objective. By nightfall the Division had made considerable progress, although its casualties were severe. On the east bank, during the 3rd, no serious fighting took place, but preparations were made to drive the enemy out of his last line of trenches. However, early in the morning

* *Vide* Official History, Vol. III, pp. 117, 118.

† The 36th and 45th Sikhs lost 16 British and 28 Indian officers, and 988 other ranks

of the 4th, it was found that the Turks had slipped away from the position during the night, and were holding only the line from the Liquorice Factory, on the west bank, westwards towards the south end of the Shumran bend, at which —it was ascertained by the Cavalry Division—they still had troops.

With the Turkish withdrawal from the Hai salient, the third phase in the operations may be said to have come to a successful close. Since the 13th December, General Maude had cleared the right bank of the Tigris of the enemy up to and including the line of the Hai. His casualties were 8,524—small enough in proportion to his achievement—and he had inflicted far heavier losses—estimated at over 10,000—on the enemy.

Although east of the Hai the Turks had no foothold left to them on the right bank of the Tigris, west of the Hai they occupied a strong position in the Dahra bend. Their defences there ran approximately due west from the Liquorice Factory, at the mouth of the Hai, towards the southern end of the Shumran bend, covering about two miles of front. Between the right of these defences and the river, the gap was filled by entrenched posts, while other entrenchments had been constructed at the south end and western arm of the Shumran bend.

The Turkish defences were strong, and in view of the fact that they formed the last stronghold from which the enemy could cover his line of communication or counter-attack to regain the line of the Hai (should he later on be in a position to do so) it was to be expected that the resistance would be particularly stubborn. Between Dahra and Shumran there were about 6,500 rifles and 14 guns, and already the Turkish defence had given a good account of itself. General Maude —always wishful to avoid heavy casualties—decided to proceed cautiously in attacking the Dahra position.

On the 8th February, the 3rd Corps was occupying a general line approximately running from just south of the Liquorice Factory, parallel with the Tigris for half a mile; thence slightly south of west for about a mile. 1st Corps (still observing the enemy at Sannaiyat) was responsible for the river front on the right bank as far as the Hai, where its 8th Brigade (attached to the 14th Division) was holding a position at the mouth of the stream, and for protecting the rear of the 3rd Corps west of the Hai. The southern flank

of the 3rd Corps communications was protected by the G.O.C. "Tigris Defences."

General Marshall's plan for the 3rd Corps attack was to pin the enemy to his chief strong point, the Liquorice Factory, by a demonstration, and to assault the trenches further to the west, his flank covered by the Corps Cavalry, while the Cavalry Division moved towards Shumran bend to intercept any withdrawal of the enemy's troops towards the Turkish bridge of boats.

On the 9th February, the fourth phase in the operations —the attack at Dahra—was begun, and made a little progress. From the beginning, the battle was fierce, and the enemy put in several strong counter-attacks. However, by dawn on the 10th, the 3rd Corps had made ground to the front and on the left bank towards Shumran at the cost of 367 casualties. That day, the 10th, the attack was resumed and made good progress northward and westward, and the Liquorice Factory was captured. That night, the right of the 3rd Corps reached the Tigris about half a mile above the Liquorice Factory, whence the general line of the British front ran a little south of west towards the end of the Shumran peninsula.

During the night 10th/11th, the enemy shortened his front by withdrawing into his rearward defences, and on the morning of the 11th, the 3rd Corps were able steadily to advance westwards towards the eastern arm of the Shumran bend. By midnight, 11th/12th, the front line ran from a point on the Tigris a mile and a quarter upstream of the Liquorice Factory to a point on the river about a mile downstream of the southern end of the Shumran bend; thus the Turks were completely hemmed in in the Dahra bend. Meanwhile, the two brigades lent by the 1st Corps assumed responsibility for the protection of the western flank of the 3rd Corps, which allowed the 3rd Corps to concentrate for the final stages of the operation. The task confronting the attackers was not an easy one. In front of the enemy's defences the ground was flat and open, and every yard of it was covered by the fire of the main position and of the advanced posts and machine guns by which the Turks meant to break up the attack. Before an assault on the main position could be made it was necessary that these advanced positions should be knocked out and that approach and assembly trenches below the surface of the open desert should be prepared. Between the 12th and the 14th, therefore, General Marshall

devoted his efforts to clearing up the important advanced tactical localities, which, after some severe fighting—on the 12th particularly, the action was a fierce one—were taken. As the result, the 3rd Corps were able to attack the enemy's main position on the 15th February. On that day, the 13th and 14th Divisions assaulted the centre of the defences while the Cavalry Division operated towards the west of the Shumran bend. The assault, after a short, intense artillery bombardment, went forward with great dash and by midday had made excellent progress, which was maintained until about 1600 hours. By this time the hostile resistance—excepting for a small portion of the defences at the extreme top of the Dahra bend—had almost entirely broken down. Rain now began to fall heavily, but during the night the 3rd Corps exploited its success and completed the capture of the bend, which was achieved at the moderate cost of about five hundred casualties. Meanwhile, the Cavalry Division, supported by a Brigade of the 13th Division, had captured the line of the Massag Canal, which ran south from the southern end of the Shumran bend.

With the capture of the Dahra bend, organised resistance on the river bank of the Tigris, ceased to exist. For two months General Maude had hammered away at the enemy's defences, driving him out of them step by step and inflicting heavy casualties upon him. At the Hai, at Khadairi bend, at the Salient, the Turks had struggled valiantly but vainly to stave off defeat; now, at Dahra, they were swept off the right bank altogether—between Sheikh Saad and Shumran they held not a yard of ground. This time—unlike the previous year—the very elements themselves were against the enemy, for had the rain fallen a few days earlier the attack would have been held up, and he would have gained a sorely-needed respite in which to reorganise his battered defences.

CHAPTER IX.

THE OFFENSIVE ON THE TIGRIS—(*continued*).

The situation in the Caucasus and in north-west Persia in January, 1917, and its effect on the Tigris Front—The possible developments in British policy—The situation on the Tigris after the battle at Dahra Bend—General Maude's plan—the assault at Sannaiyat on the 17th—Preparations for crossing the Tigris—General Maude's orders for the operations on the 23rd February—The crossing at Shumran and the final assault at Sannaiyat—The Turkish retreat—The "break out" from the Shumran Peninsula—The pursuit—Administrative arrangements cause a halt at Aziziyeh—Comments on the operations between the 12th December, 1916, and the 28th February, 1917.

While General Maude had been wearing down the enemy on the Tigris, events elsewhere had been showing signs of moving. In the Caucasus, the Russians were planning an offensive against the Turkish Second Army, as well as an advance southwards towards Mosul, Samarra and Baghdad.* In north-west Persia, General Baratov, whose force had been considerably increased, was contemplating an advance through Khanikin against the rear of the Turkish XVIII Corps on the Tigris. It seemed, therefore, that when the winter should begin to wane, and movement in the mountains should become possible, the Turks in Mesopotamia would find themselves subjected to a heavy concerted attack from three directions—an attack which would so weaken their power of resistance on the Tigris that General Maude would be able to carry out a big advance. With this possible development uppermost in his mind, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff had asked General Maude, on the 3rd February, what force he thought he would be able to maintain in Baghdad in April, and General Maude had replied, one division of cavalry and three divisions of infantry—or even four if local supplies were available. It was clearly understood, however, that at the moment there was no change in the policy of the Government, or in the rôle of Force D.

A little later, information was received to the effect that the Turks were preparing to restore the situation in Mesopotamia by detaching troops from the Caucasus and north-west Persia and sending them to the Tigris,

* *Vide* Map No. 1.

but this did not shake General Maude's confidence. Quite apart from the intended Russian offensive, his strategical situation was satisfactory. He had cleared the right bank of the enemy; he had punished him so severely that his strength on the Tigris front was only about 10,300 rifles and 91 guns, while his own force on the Tigris amounted to 46,000 rifles and 174 guns. In these circumstances he could face the future without apprehension.

After the success at Dahra, General Maude had complete tactical freedom of manœuvre on the right bank of the Tigris as far as the Shumran Bend. Between the Shumran Bend and Bughaila the enemy had about 1,300 rifles, 2 guns and a few cavalry—a mere nothing with which to stem the advance of the victorious 3rd Corps. However, rapid movement was difficult because of the floods, and so long as the British supply-ships could not come up the river beyond Sannaiyat it was impossible for General Maude to maintain a big advance towards, say, Bughaila, with the object of cutting the enemy's line of communication with his battle positions on the left bank. In other words, although tactically General Maude had complete freedom of manœuvre, his ability to make use of that freedom was considerably restricted by the administrative situation.

It was on the left bank that the enemy's army remained in being; therefore, it was on the left bank that he could be brought to a decisive battle. So far, General Maude's operations had had the effect of causing the Turks to disperse their forces very widely—between Sannaiyat and Shumran. Their dispositions on the twenty-five miles of front which they occupied on the left bank were as follows:—At Sannaiyat, 3,000 rifles and 19 guns; between Sannaiyat and Kut, 1,100 rifles and 6 guns; on the Kut and Shumran peninsulas, 4,500 rifles and 60 guns, and between Shumran and Bughaila, 400 rifles and 4 guns. It was obvious that in this widely-extended front there were several weak spots, but the front as a whole was "covered" by the flooded river—a very formidable obstacle to the attackers.

It was equally obvious that the best chance of achieving a comparatively inexpensive success was simultaneously to operate against the two extremes of the enemy's attenuated line—thereby preventing him from quickly concentrating his force at either point.

General Maude decided, therefore, to assault the Sannaiyat position—which by reason of the enemy's heavy

casualties could not be held in so great strength as it had formerly been—and at the same time to throw the remainder of his force across the Tigris at Shumran, a point which tactically was suitable for the operation. On the 16th February he issued his orders for the operation. The 1st Corps was to assault Sannaiyat on the 17th, while the 3rd Corps cleared the enemy off the right bank of the river bend west of Shumran, and, if possible, forced a crossing at the bend, supported by the Cavalry Division and Mobile Bridging Train. However, during the night 16th/17th very heavy rain fell, and movement became so difficult that the idea of forcing a crossing on the 17th had to be abandoned.

At 1400 hours on the 17th, the 7th Division (1st Corps), supported by a heavy artillery bombardment, assaulted Sannaiyat and reached the second line of trenches. For an hour, all seemed going well. Preparations for assaulting the third line were being made, when the Turks put in a very fierce counter attack supported by an extremely heavy and accurate bombardment. Owing to the disorganisation caused by the counter attack, and to the difficulties of moving over the wet, slippery ground and in the congested trenches, the 7th Division could do nothing to restore the situation—the leading troops fell back to their starting point, and the attack failed.

Meanwhile, the 3rd Corps and the Cavalry Division had ascertained that the right bank was clear of the enemy for seventeen miles above Shumran.

Between the 16th and the 21st, rain fell intermittently and the river continued to rise (on the 21st it was within a couple of feet of overflowing, after which the flood began to abate somewhat), but meanwhile General Maude was making preparations for a crossing at Shumran. Secrecy was of supreme importance, and all the preliminary reconnaissances and preparatory measures at the selected point—the southern end of the Shumran bend—were carried out in the dark, while less carefully concealed "preparations" were put in hand near the Liquorice Factory with the object of inducing the enemy to believe this to be the real centre of activity. The southern end of the Shumran bend was selected as the site for a bridge because a crossing at that point could be effectively supported by fire from the right bank at the shoulders of the bend; because the river was only three hundred and forty yards wide there, and because on the far side there was a shelving beach suitable for landing troops on. The bank on the far side of the river was defended by loophole trenches and machine guns, and on this account it was

essential to get troops across to deal with these defences before the building of the bridge could begin. It was decided that a covering force should be put across in three ferries working between points downstream of the bridge-site, and that each ferry should convey one battalion of infantry. At first it was intended that this covering force should be landed by night, but the difficulties of making an accurate landing in the darkness, and of adequately supporting the infantry by observed artillery, machine gun and trench mortar fire were so clearly foreseen that finally it was decided that the crossing should not begin until it was light enough to see.

While the 3rd Corps was carrying out the multifarious preparations for the crossing, the 1st Corps displayed abnormal activity in front of Sannaiyat in order to attract the enemy's attention.

On the 21st February, General Maude's dispositions were :

1st Corps.—7th Division (with two battalions of the 3rd Division attached) on the left bank opposite Sannaiyat. 3rd Division (less one and a half brigades) occupying the right bank from Sannaiyat to the Hai.

3rd Corps.—Between the Hai and the Canal running south from the southern end of the Shumran bend were the 13th Division and one brigade from the 1st Corps. The 14th Division, which was to make the crossing, was concentrated near Kala Haji Fahan.

Cavalry Division.—At Besouia.

On the morning of the 22nd, General Maude issued his order for the operations. The 1st Corps was to act vigourously at Sannaiyat on the 22nd, and was to make an assault (on a limited objective) with the object of drawing the enemy defences. In addition, 1st Corps was to display great activity on the right bank and on the night 22nd/23rd, was to carry out a raid across the river at Magasis in order to mislead the enemy over General Maude's real intention. The 3rd Corps was to push a covering-force across the river at Shumran at dawn on the 23rd, to establish a bridgehead on the left bank and, while pushing the enemy back and holding him away from the river line, to construct a bridge at the south end of the peninsula. After this, the 3rd Corps was to cross the river and advance to clear the Shumran peninsula. The Cavalry Division was to be at one hour's notice from 0900 hours on the 23rd. The Royal Flying

Corps was to carry out protection in the air, close and medium reconnaissance, and artillery co-operation duties.

On the 22nd February, the 7th Division once again assaulted the Sannaiyat defences—the rock against which since April, 1916, wave after wave of British troops had vainly flung themselves. This time the waves were unbroken. By the evening, after severe fighting, nine hundred yards of the enemy's second line had been captured and were being consolidated. The attack sustained 1,332 casualties, but the defence suffered still more heavily—particularly in the succession of gallant counter attacks which the Turks delivered throughout the day. During the night 22nd/23rd the 1st Corps carried out equally successfully its subsidiary rôle —the raid at Magasis—a gallant affair which, at least, served to mystify and mislead the enemy.

By the night of the 22nd, the preparations for the operation at the Shumran bend had been completed by the 3rd Corps. Practically nothing of the enemy's dispositions was known, because the need for secrecy had precluded any special observation of the Shumran peninsula, but it was believed that the river line was held by piquets and supports, with a reserve at the barracks at Dahra.

General Marshall's plan was for the covering force to occupy a position across the Shumran peninsula about fifteen hundred yards from the river bank; to build his bridge, and then to throw in the whole weight of his Corps against the enemy opposing him on the left bank. The operation was to be supported by the whole artillery of the Corps disposed east, south-east, and west of the bend (ready to fire a carefully arranged programme), trench mortars and machine guns. During the night of the 22nd/23rd the 13th Division was to make a feint crossing at the Liquorice Factory—a rôle which was carried out successfully enough to deceive the Turks into moving troops into the Kut peninsula, troops which were lost to the battle fronts at Sannaiyat and Shumran. Throughout the night, the preliminary movements of the covering force and of its supporting artillery and machine guns, and the final preparation of signal communications and of ramps at the bridge-site, went on. By 0515 hours on the 23rd everything was ready.

By 0530 hours, when it was just possible to see the opposite bank, the pontoons for the ferries had been silently launched in the river; shortly afterwards, the "first flight" started to cross (each ferry consisted of thirteen pontoons manned by

specially-trained rowers, whose task in a flooded river running at five or six miles an hour, was not an easy one). The enemy was taken by surprise—it was not until 0630 hours that his artillery commenced to shell the river line—but at two out of the three ferries he put up a desperate resistance. At Nos. 2 and 3 crossings the pontoons were caught by rifle and machine-gun fire and only a portion of them were able to complete the journey, or, having completed it, to get back again for reinforcements. The fighting was hot, and although the first flight hung on to their ground most gallantly, eventually Nos. 2 and 3 ferries had to cease working. By 0730 hours, only No. 1 was able to continue to transport troops. Nevertheless, by 1400 hours, all three battalions of the covering force had established themselves on the left bank, and had made ground beyond the ferry-head. By 1500 hours, the covering force had gained a line running east and west across the peninsula about a mile from its southern extremity. Meanwhile, the artillery of the 3rd Corps had inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy, and the Bridging Train had done remarkable work.

About 0730 hours, General Egerton, who commanded the 14th Division (detailed to carry out the crossing) had ordered the construction of the pontoon bridge to begin. Within an hour considerable progress had been made at the shore end, and the specially armoured motor boats which were to tow the heavy pontoons into position against the raging current were ready to be launched. By 1630 hours the bridge —two hundred and ninety-five yards long—was built. Its construction in eight hours—the work carried out under artillery fire, and jeopardised by baulks of timber let loose upon the flood by the Turks—was a very fine performance. By midnight on the night 23rd/24th, the whole of the 14th Division had crossed it, and the 13th Division was closing up on the right bank bridgehead. The crossing of the Tigris was an accomplished fact—and at the cost of only 350 casualties.

Elsewhere, too, success attended General Maude's plan. As he had anticipated, the Turks had been drawn towards Sannaiyat by the successful assault made on the 22nd, with the result that at Shumran early on the 23rd their forces were so small that they could not take the counter-offensive against the 3rd Corps. To pin the Turks to the Sannaiyat front and to prevent them from reinforcing Shumran, General Maude had planned a resumption of the 1st Corps attack; and this was pushed home with such vigour that by nightfall on the

23rd, the third and fourth lines of the Sannaiyat defences were in his possession. His plan, therefore, had succeeded almost better than he could have hoped. At the cost of comparatively few casualties, he had driven the enemy out of the first four lines of his main stronghold; he had secured a position on the left bank from which he could intercept the retreat of the enemy's army, and he had inflicted far heavier casualties than he had received.

At 1700 hours on the 23rd, General Maude issued a short order in which he laid stress upon the necessity for gaining a decision by exploiting the success which had been won, and in which he ordered the 1st Corps to continue to push the enemy westwards, the 3rd Corps to concentrate on the left bank and to enclose the enemy from the west, and the Cavalry Division to be ready to move at 0600 hours on the 24th.

In accordance with these instructions, General Cobbe, commanding the 1st Corps, ordered vigorous patrolling to be carried out during the night and a resumption of the attack to be made next morning. General Marshall, commanding the 3rd Corps, ordered the 14th Division to advance at 0615 hours on the 24th, and to capture the position which ran across the neck of the Shumran peninsula about two miles beyond the British advance posts, while the 13th Division crossed the river.

On the 24th, the attack of the 14th Division began, as planned at 0615 hours. By 0720 hours, after a dashing advance, carried out under heavy fire, it reached the line of the Dahra Ridge, a low line of sandhills lying across the peninsula between the two shoulders of the bends. Here it was held up by the determined resistance of the Turks, who clung with desperate tenacity to their ground, which was broken and intersected by canals and water-cuts.

At Sannaiyat, during the night 23rd/24th, the Turkish XVIII Army Corps had rapidly fallen back. By dawn on the 24th, the 7th Division had pushed on to occupy the fifth line of defences and was preparing to advance to the sixth line. At 0630 hours, air reconnaissance showed the enemy to be in full retreat. General Maude thereupon issued orders for the 1st Corps to press on, and for the Cavalry Division to cross the river at Shumran, pass through the 3rd Corps and take up the pursuit of the retiring enemy.

By now the enemy's resistance had completely broken down, and—almost unopposed—during the day the 1st Corps swept on up the left bank, taking the last line of the Sannaiyat

trenches and over-running the Turkish positions at Nakhailat and Suwada at a cost of only twenty-nine casualties.

The 3rd Corps and the Cavalry Division were not so successful. Facing the neck of the Shumran peninsular, the enemy held a position which was admirably suited for fighting a delaying action. The ground was broken and intersected with dry irrigation channels; the Turkish machine guns were skilfully sited and bravely manned; with grim determination the enemy's rearguard hung on to its position, fighting for the time which the XVIII Corps so sorely needed. Until about 1400 hours, the Turks succeeded in preventing any movement beyond the Dahra Ridge. Then the Cavalry Division got through at the eastern end of the position, and, swinging round up the river, pushed on after the enemy's main column. Before the Cavalry had gone far, they came into contact with a strong force of hostile infantry occupying a dry canal which ran in a north-easterly direction from the top of the western arm of the Shumran bend, and by 1515 hours they were closely engaged in a dismounted action on a front of some three miles. The Turks were supported by artillery; the British artillery lacked observation—communications between the right and left bank had broken down—and could not give the Cavalry Division effective support, nor were they able to help the infantry to get beyond the Dahra Ridge. For the remainder of the day, little or no progress was made. At 1900 hours, finding that no further advance seemed possible, the Cavalry Division withdrew and went back into bivouac. Thus, during the day the Turkish rearguard fulfilled its rôle very effectively.

By nightfall on the 24th, the 1st Corps had the Sannaiyat position behind them; the 3rd Corps and Cavalry Division were concentrated on the left bank in the Shumran peninsula; the gunboat flotilla was off Kut; and, most important of all, perhaps, the supply-ships could come up to Shumran.

At 1925 hours, General Maude issued orders for the pursuit to be continued. After months of trench fighting his army was not very well-fitted for open warfare, but there could be no doubt that he must press on after his retreating enemy if he wished to drive home his success. His orders for the 25th were for the Cavalry Division and one division of the 3rd Corps to move at 0600 hours. The Cavalry was to move round the enemy's northern flank, while the Infantry advanced along the left bank of the Tigris. The Naval Flotilla was to co-operate in this advance; and the 1st Corps

was to take over the battlefields on both banks as far as the western side of the Shumran peninsula.

During the night 24th/25th, the Turkish rearguard withdrew, and this was reported early on the 25th by an air reconnaissance which located the enemy's main body at Bughaila, and a rearguard of about 1,700 rifles and 20 guns some seven miles further east, occupying a dry canal at Imam Mahdi.

The 13th Division of the 3rd Corps, advancing along the left bank in the morning, met with opposition east of this line, at the canal running north from the north end of the Husaini bend. The enemy put up a very stubborn resistance; heavy fighting went on all day, and continued until about 0200 hours on the 26th, when the Turks drew off. Meanwhile, the Cavalry Division also was held up. Having reached a point about four miles north-east of Imam Mahdi by 1130 hours, at 1300 hours it was ordered by General Maude to advance on the village, but the advance was soon checked by rifle fire. Instead of holding back, and making use of its mobility to act against a more vulnerable point, the Division went on to attack some 1,000 entrenched infantry, with whom it became so closely engaged that it could not extricate itself before 1730 hours, by which time men were fatigued and horses sorely in need of water. There was no water nearer than the river—consequently the Cavalry Division was pulled out and brought back to the Tigris to bivouac in the rear of the 3rd Corps. There is little doubt that on this day the Cavalry missed a great opportunity of striking a decisive blow at the enemy's retirement.

At 2125 hours, General Maude issued orders for the 26th to the effect that the 3rd Corps, supported by all available artillery, was to push on, while the Cavalry Division was to move wide of the enemy's left flank and to strike at his rear about Bughaila.

During the night 25th/26th, the rearguard which had held up the advance of the 13th Division throughout the previous day slipped away, with the result that the 3rd Corps was able to make good progress in the morning. By 1400 hours, the 13th Division had cleared Imam Mahdi; the 14th Division, which had closed up during the 25th, was about five miles to the right; the Cavalry Division was some eleven miles due north of Bughaila, and the Naval Flotilla, prepared to take up the pursuit, had reached Bughaila. The Flotilla pressed forward with the utmost dash, heavily shelling the retiring enemy, and steaming on behind the

rearguard to gain touch with the main body. The appearance of the gunboats, and their close range fire, converted the retreat of the Turks into a rout. Completely demoralised, they streamed away over the desert towards Baghdad, pursued by the ships until darkness compelled a halt. The value of this action was very great. Neither the 3rd Corps nor the Cavalry Division attained a decisive success during the day, and it was the intervention of the Naval Flotilla that prevented the XVIII Corps from drawing off in comparatively good order, and caused the Turkish force which had so stoutly fought at Sannaiyat, at Khadairi, at Dahra, practically to cease to exist as an organised body.

On the 27th, the Cavalry reached Aziziyeh—the point at which General Nixon's pursuit Army had ceased in 1915.

It was at this point that General Maude's pursuit, too, was to cease. Although he was anxious to allow his demoralised enemy no respite, although by pausing he was missing an opportunity to smash the enemy's resistance before it could be re-organised, administration was too much for him. His administrative arrangements, admirably as they had served him during the offensive, were not designed to maintain a rapid and prolonged advance. His Chief of Staff and his Q.M.G. concurred in advising him that his land transport could not keep his force supplied with all it needed; his Inspector General of Communications said that a pause for re-organisation was imperative—but that in five days he would be in a position to guarantee an adequate delivery of supplies at any distance.

On the 28th February, therefore, General Maude broke off his pursuit. The Cavalry Division withdrew to camp east of Aziziyeh. The 3rd Corps stood fast between Aziziyeh and Bughaila, the 1st Corps closed up to Qala Shadi, and the administrative arrangements were brought into line with the strategical requirements of the situation.

Those requirements form a subject which will be dealt with in the next chapter. Before considering them, it may be well shortly to examine the chief lessons which can be drawn from the fighting during the period under review—that is, between the 12th December, 1916, and the 28th February, 1917.

General Maude's plan has been criticised as being slow and lacking in enterprise in view of the facts that he had strategical initiative and a very great superiority in strength; he had the power to manœuvre and the forces with which

to manœuvre effectively against a passive and comparatively weak defence. In these circumstances it has been asserted it would have been a quicker and more certain method of gaining a decision to have assaulted the enemy in the rear of Sannaiyat from across the river, or—masking his defences on the right bank—to have moved straight up the Tigris to, say, Bughaila, and there to have thrown the army on to the enemy's communications.

As has already been pointed out, certain definite limitations were imposed upon General Maude by the instructions he received, and by the climatic and topographical conditions in which he was called upon to fight. The chief motive of the operations was to achieve a local success as cheaply as possible; his expenditure in manpower, in munitions, in mechanical transport and in shipping had to be kept low. Even before the offensive, the maintenance of his force was making serious demands upon Imperial resources; he knew that at least one division might be withdrawn from him for transfer to a theatre of war in which it could be employed to greater advantage to the progress of the war as a whole; he realised that his enemy might be considerably reinforced. The dangers attendant upon attempting a rapid and long advance beyond his river-head in a country which had no land communications, in which there was no drinking water excepting in the river, and in which movement was apt to be made impossible for days together by rain and by floods, had been very vividly demonstrated by the operations of General Nixon and his successors. He knew himself to be opposed by an enemy whose defence would be resolute. The costly risks and difficulties of attempting to cross a river in the face of an unshaken and determined opposition were sufficiently obvious. The supreme importance of every strategical plan being administratively sound was self-evident. Taking these factors into consideration, it is clear that to attempt to rush a decision was to risk more than General Maude felt himself justified in risking. As we have seen, his original intention was limited to advancing to the Hai, and afterwards operating as favourably as might be possible in accordance with the strategical and administrative security of his force. This he did by carrying out a methodical series of limited operations, a series of steps in which each was carefully consolidated and made secure against mishap before the next was begun. That he was anxious to press a decision we know from the earnest consideration which he gave to certain projects for throwing

a force across the Tigris before the enemy had been driven from the Dahra bend; but he was at least as anxious to avoid heavy casualties, and he ended by coming to the conclusion that the enemy must be worn down by ceaseless, steady pressure, and forced to stretch his forces out to breaking-point before the attempt at striking a decisive blow could be risked. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. The plan succeeded in effecting the virtual destruction of the enemy's army on the Tigris—the destruction of manpower, resources and morale—at a cost which was moderate enough. More could not have been done by assaulting the flank and rear of the Sannaiyat defences—where the enemy was concentrated and prepared—or by pushing forward across the open desert with ever-lengthening communications lying susceptible to interruption by rain, flood and Arab incursions. The longest way round is often the quickest way home.

On one point, however, General Maude's conduct of the operations appears to be open to criticism. That is, the handling of his cavalry. Admittedly, the Cavalry Division was an improvised formation, with an improvised commander and staff; admittedly, General Maude centralised control over his subordinate commanders to an unusual degree: the result was that the Cavalry Commander was left without initiative and was tied—by wireless—to G.H.Q. for decision on points which he could and should have decided for himself.

Throughout the earlier phases of the operations, the rôle of the cavalry was restricted by wet weather and by the difficulties of supply. "To waste the energy of cavalry in "operations which can have no decisive result on the battle "is uneconomical ..." and we find General Maude limiting the scope of the Cavalry Division to protective reconnaissance as soon as he found the conditions were unsuitable for decisive cavalry action round the enemy's flanks. When, however, the opportunity did occur—as it occurred during the pursuit on the 25th and 26th February—the Cavalry Division was still kept in leading strings, and it was employed more like mounted infantry than like cavalry.

Lack of water for the horses was, of course, a great difficulty, but—as was subsequently proved in mobile operations which were most successfully carried out in 1918—it was not an insuperable one. One of the chief aims of a cavalry commander is to save his horses fatigue and distress, but there comes a time when in order to obtain a decision horse flesh must be expended freely, provided that the expenditure is

proportionate to the result. Yet, after the "break out" from the Shumran peninsula, we see the Cavalry Division practically ineffective because it was pulled back behind the infantry to water and wasted valuable time and energy in getting there. On the 24th, the Cavalry broke off the action with the Turkish rearguard—which they attacked in front dismounted, instead of outflanking from the north—at 1900 hours, and got back to bivouac five hours later! On the 25th, the Cavalry Division, with the chance of going straight to Bughaila and getting astride the enemy's communications and harassing his pursuit, made a dismounted attack upon entrenched infantry and could not be extricated and concentrated until four and a half hours later; afterwards it was moved back twelve miles to its bivouac, which it reached at midnight.

Had the Cavalry Division been organised with a proportion of light mechanical vehicles as its train, and led in the bold, resolute way in which it was led later on in the campaign, there can be little doubt that the Turkish retreat after Shumran would have been broken far more effectively than it was, and that some severe fighting would have been saved us later on.

The final phase in the operations illustrates very clearly the difficulty of organising and launching the pursuit—particularly at the end of a long phase of static operations. Troops are untrained in hard marching, they have to be kept far back until the last possible moment so as to avoid shelling —with the result that they cannot catch up with the tail of the retirement. The forward troops, on the other hand, may be so exhausted by overcoming the resistance of a resolute rearguard that they cannot press on, and thus the opportunity for a decision cannot be seized. In these operations the value of a mobile, hard-hitting pursuit force is admirably illustrated by the part played by the Naval Flotilla.

Finally, it is of interest to compare General Maude's offensive with that which was carried out in the vain endeavour to relieve Kut. At the beginning of 1916 we saw troops being thrown piecemeal into the battle—troops which could neither be maintained nor administered effectively. At the end of 1916 we see no detail left unconsidered, no measure unprepared. If faulty administration was one of the chief causes of the failure to relieve Kut, sound administration was certainly an all-important factor in the success of the offensive in 1916-17.

CHAPTER X.

THE CAPTURE OF BAGHDAD AND THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE POSITION THERE.

The halt at Aziziyeh—General Maude is informed that he is to exploit his success—Baghdad becomes the objective of the campaign—Russian co-operation—The advance—Fighting at the Diyala and on the right bank of the Tigris—The capture of Baghdad—Measures for consolidating the position—The Russian failure—Operations in March and April—Turkish project for a counter offensive in the Autumn—The situation in Mesopotamia in the summer of 1917—The situation in Mesopotamia in the autumn of 1917—The operations at Ramadi in September—The offensive in Palestine diverts Turkish reserves from Baghdad—The death of General Maude—The courses open to General Marshall, his successor—Local offensives carried out in the spring and early summer of 1918—The situation in the Caucasus—"Dunster force"—The Turkish advance from Tabriz—The renewal of General Allenby's offensive in Palestine, and its effect in Persia—General Marshall's advance on the Tigris—The defeat of the remnants of the Turkish Sixth Army—The declaration of an armistice with Turkey—British troops enter Mosul—The end of the Campaign.

On the 24th February, the day of the enemy's retirement from Sannaiyat, General Maude telegraphed to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, using almost the exact words used by General Nixon in 1915. He said, "Road to Baghdad seems "quite open . . ." and asked for instructions for his future action.

At this time, British policy was—as had been stated in September, 1916—"To establish British influence in the "Baghdad vilayet." In defeating the Turkish army on the Tigris and in advancing into the Baghdad vilayet as far as Aziziyeh, General Maude had certainly established British influence; now, was he to exploit his success to its obvious conclusion—the capture of Baghdad?

His army was quite capable of advancing; his troops were fit; his administration was in a thoroughly sound state. On the other hand, had the general politico-strategical situation changed so much that the opinions which in the past had been so definitely expressed by the General Staff—that the occupation of Baghdad would have no effect upon the war, and that it would result in our general strategic position being weakened rather than strengthened—could justly be entirely reversed?

At the time, Imperial resources—particularly in shipping—were severely taxed by the demands made upon them for the general conduct of the war, but in London and at Delhi political opinion was strongly in favour of the capture of Baghdad because of the prestige attaching to the achievement. Strategically, it could be argued, it was extremely desirable to occupy the city because it was the only base from which a Turkish army could operate effectively against the British in Mesopotamia or against south-west Persia. It appeared most unlikely that hostile reinforcements could arrive on the Tigris front in time effectively to oppose General Maude, who might reasonably hope, therefore, to capture Baghdad and to hold it—helped in his action by the promised renewal of operations by the Russians in the Caucasus and in north-west Persia. Strategically and tactically there appeared to be nothing to prevent the advance; administratively—as we have seen—General Maude considered it feasible, as it was—at a price.

On the 2nd March, General Maude received a telegram from the Chief of the Imperial General Staff informing him that, subject to the security of his force and to the capacity of his communications, he was to press on towards Baghdad and exploit his success to the full extent which he himself judged "useful and feasible." The telegram went on to say that the superiority of the British and Russian forces which would shortly be operating in Mesopotamia appeared to be sufficient to enable General Maude safely to occupy Baghdad, provided that he felt that he could maintain a force of four divisions of infantry and one of cavalry there, and informed him that the 13th Division would remain at his disposal and that more troops would be sent to him from India for duty on the lengthened line of communication.

The decision to make Baghdad the objective of the campaign was made; automatically, fresh expenditure in manpower and material was incurred.

At the same time, Sir William Robertson telegraphed a report of the situation to the Russian Headquarters in the Caucasus and suggested that by an early commencement of the Russian offensive towards Mosul our Allies would very effectively co-operate in the operations on the Tigris and help to bring about a decisive success in Mesopotamia

Meanwhile, waiting for his instructions, General Maude had been pressing on his preparations for an advance. By the time the telegram from London arrived at his Head-

quarters, he had concentrated the Naval Flotilla, the 3rd Corps, and the Cavalry Division at Aziziyeh, and had made excellent progress with his administrative re-organisation. Unfortunately, the pause in the operations was usefully turned to account by the enemy, too, who availed himself of the sorely-needed respite to organise a last attempt to bar the road to Baghdad and to effect a junction between the two widely-separated Corps (the XIII and XVIII) of his army.

On the 5th March, when General Maude advanced from Aziziyeh, he found himself resolutely opposed by a force of infantry and artillery at Lajj, twenty miles up-stream, which held up the advance of the Cavalry all day. The force withdrew by night, and the British advance went on. On the morning of the 7th, opposition was met on the line of the river Diyala, where the Turks were found to be holding a position on the right bank of that river on a front of about thirteen miles. Deeming the enemy's force to be nothing more than a rearguard, General Maude ordered the 3rd Corps to force a crossing of the Diyala on the night of the 7th/8th, while he constructed a bridge across the Tigris at Bawi, ten miles down stream, over which he could pass troops to the right bank to advance direct upon Baghdad. The Diyala proved to be strongly held by the remnants of the XVIII Corps, and the first attempt to cross the river failed—nor was it until 0400 hours on the 10th that the 13th Division of the 3rd Corps succeeded. The fighting at the Diyala was very fierce, and great gallantry was displayed by a party of about one hundred men of the North Lancashire Regiment who forced their way on to the right bank of the river on the 8th and hung on, completely isolated, during the whole of the 9th, until the arrival of the 13th Division on the 10th.

While this unexpectedly severe fighting on the left bank of the Tigris was going on, General Maude turned his attention to the right bank, where he intended the Cavalry Division and the 1st Corps to advance rapidly on Baghdad. It was not until 1800 hours on the 8th that the Cavalry Division got across the bridge which had been constructed at Bawi; followed an hour and a half later by the leading brigade of the leading division of the 1st Corps. The maps in use were inaccurate, no previous reconnaissance had been possible, the area of operations was freely intersected by deep canals; consequently the rate of advance was slow. However, the Cavalry Division plodded on, receiving information at 2130 hours from an air reconnaissance that Turkish trenches had been seen on the Umm at Tubal sandhills (between the Tigris and the south-east end of Lake

Aqar Quf) and that the enemy appeared to be holding a position in advance of the hills. About dawn the Cavalry gained contact with this advanced position, completely surprising the Turks. However, instead of galloping the position the Cavalry Commander decided to outflank the Turkish right and to leave the attack to the Infantry. The moment passed—surprise was thrown away, and when the 7th Division went in to the attack they were able to make but little progress, and that at the cost of over seven hundred casualties. Meanwhile, the Cavalry Division failed to locate or to outflank the enemy's right. However, during the night 9th/10th, while the 13th Division was forcing the crossing of the Diyala, the Turks withdrew from their advanced position, and at daybreak on the 10th the 7th Division was able to advance to attack the main position at Umm at Tubal. Here, again, the enemy put up a strong resistance, and throughout the day held off the attackers, who suffered very much from extreme heat, thirst and strong, hot wind and dust-storms. By nightfall, nevertheless, the Turks appreciated the hopelessness of their position. On both banks of the Tigris the British, in vastly superior numbers,* were pressing back the defence, their columns converging upon Baghdad. To continue to stand outside the city meant the annihilation of the XVIII Corps. On the night of the 10th, therefore, after a struggle for which they deserve all honour, the Turks withdrew from the positions covering Baghdad and retreated northwards up the river.

On the afternoon of March 11th, General Maude entered the city, the goal which British policy had so long sought to reach.

Politically, the end seemed gained; strategically, much remained to do. General Maude at once commenced to consolidate his position—to make secure his force and his communications. It was only to be expected that Turkey would strain every nerve to restore the situation in her favour, and although at the moment reports of the arrival of reinforcements in Mesopotamia were vague, it was clear that there was no time to waste. About Baghdad there were no good covering positions from which the city could be defended.

* The XVIII Corps was 500 sabres, 9,000 rifles, and 48 guns strong. General Maude had on the Tigris 3,864 sabres, 41,479 rifles, and 174 guns.

It was the focus of converging routes, by all of which the enemy could advance against it, and there was a very real danger that by cutting the "bunds" on the Tigris and the Euphrates the Turks could flood the desert for miles around the city. The only effective way to deal with the situation was to push out beyond Baghdad to occupy defensive positions on the lines of approach—positions from which the danger-points on the "bunds" could be made secure. To this end, General Maude ordered a forward movement.

By the end of March, after some hard fighting and at the cost of considerable suffering from intense heat, his troops had reached the line Sharaban—Mushaidi—Faluja,* and were covering the lines of approach by way of the Diyala, Tigris and Euphrates. As for the floods, the chief danger-point in the Tigris bund was secured, but on the Euphrates the Turks succeeded in cutting an embankment and letting water into the huge lake, Aqar Quf,* which lay just to the west of Baghdad. However, owing to the facts that special measures had been taken to guard against this contingency, and that the floods of the spring of 1917 were abnormally low, little damage resulted.

While the British were consolidating their hold upon Baghdad, the Russians were very slowly coming into the picture. During General Maude's advance from Aziziyeh, the Caucasus Army had been endeavouring to co-operate with his operations by advancing southwards towards Mosul, while General Baratov, the Turkish XIII Corps falling back before him in north-west Persia, moved slowly forward to join hands with the British force north of Baghdad. The rate of progress of these movements was very uncertain because snow still lay in the mountain passes—some of the direct routes were entirely closed—and the available means of supply and transport was very inadequate. However, in spite of these difficulties, and in spite of the fact that in Russia itself the revolution had just begun, it seemed as if ultimately the Russians would succeed in reaching Mosul, and in joining hands with General Maude near Baghdad. By the middle of March, General Baratov, with 6,300 sabres, 15,000 rifles and 48 guns was steadily advancing through north-west Persia on Kermanshah*—the Turkish XIII Corps (consisting of 800 sabres, 9,000 rifles and 50 guns), still retiring before him. By this time, the British troops on the

* *Vide* **Map No. 2.**

Diyala had reached Baquba, and in order to hinder the enemy's retreat, General Maude, on March 18th—the day on which General Baratov advanced from Karind—ordered the British column to move from Baquba towards Khanikin, which he expected the enemy to reach about the 23rd. As a matter of fact, this expectation was not realised. In the narrow gorge in the Pai Taq pass, where the road descends from the Persian hills, the XIII Corps put up such an obstinate resistance that the Russians could make no progress for ten days. General Maude was unable to maintain a large force as far away as Baquba for more than a short time, and—chiefly owing to this fact—the Turks were able to extricate the XIII Corps from the battle, and to continue to retire westwards in the direction of Kifri.* On the 31st, Russian advance troops reached Qasr-i-Shirin, and on the 2nd April they joined hands with the British at Qizil Robat.

General Maude intended, having gained touch with the Russians, to concentrate upon the defeat of the remnants of the XVIII Corps on the Tigris while his Ally continued to pursue the XIII Corps and to carry out the advance from the Caucasus upon Mosul. It soon became apparent, however, that this co-operation was not forthcoming.

In Russia, the internal situation was chaotic; in the Caucasus and in Persia her troops were exhausted, and were short of food, munitions and money. On the 23rd April General Maude was definitely informed that the Russian advance on Mosul would not take place, and that the limit of Russian responsibility could only be the occupation of the line Rowanduz—Sulaimaniya—Qizil Robat—many, many miles north of Baghdad and Mosul. The general effect of this development in the situation was to leave the British entirely responsible for the security of Baghdad, and of the whole of Mesopotamia as far as the Persian Gulf.

Early in April, before this debâcle, General Maude, in order to help the Russians to establish themselves on the Tigris and to crush any enemy within reach, began operations against what was left of the XVIII Corps. The remnants amounted to about 5,600 rifles and 50 guns, and were disposed so as to hold the line of the river Adhaim, Istabulat (covering Samarra) on the Tigris, and Ramadi on the Euphrates. The XIII Corps, consisting of about 11,000 rifles and 60 guns remained in the Kifri area. The operations, which lasted throughout the month of April, were very

* *Vide* **Map No. 2.**

successful. Acting on interior lines against two hostile Corps on exterior lines, General Maude succeeded in bringing the enemy to battle time and time again, in inflicting upon him heavy losses, in driving back in diverging directions the two parts of his force, and in securely establishing his own advanced positions on the general line of the Adhaim—Samarra—Faluja. Fighting was severe; the heat was intense; dust-storms were frequent. At the end of the operations, General Maude, his enemy beaten, demoralised, and driven back almost out of his reach, called a halt and devoted himself to the consolidation of his gains, the development of local resources, and the creation of an effective political administration, while his weary troops got what rest they could.

At this time, there were many indications that the enemy intended to regain Baghdad. With Russia virtually out of the war, it seemed as if Turkey could concentrate upon a big offensive in Mesopotamia, and it was reported that plans were being made for the formation of a new army—the "Yilderim" Army—for an autumn campaign. It was difficult to arrive at an accurate estimate of Turkish manpower or of the magnitude of the effort Turkey could make, but at the War Office the Intelligence Staff opined that the enemy might at *best,* be able to concentrate sixteen divisions in Mesopotamia by the middle of October. Of these, it was thought the greater part would be directed upon Baghdad, the remainder being intended for the Persian front, where quite early in May the Russians had once more retired, having relinquished all hope of taking an effective part in future operations.

Nevertheless, General Maude was confident of his ability to deal with any counter offensive his enemy could bring against him. He was getting extra troops for the defence of his lines of communication; extra machine-gun companies; his strength was seventy-four thousand rifles and sabres and two hundred and ninety guns; administratively his situation was sound, and the enemy, in order to attack him had a long and difficult advance to achieve and maintain.

In the summer of 1917, after many vicissitudes, the British Force in Mesopotamia had won for itself a position which seemed reasonably secure in spite of the fact that in the failure of Russia Great Britain had lost the assistance on which she had recently counted in framing her war policy in the Middle East.

The position was secure—but at what a cost!

At the end of July, reviewing the general situation, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff laid great stress upon his difficulties in keeping the army in Mesopotamia supplied with the personnel, animals and material required to keep it mobile, and in meeting the demands made upon Imperial shipping.

Here, on the Tigris, lay a great army—practically every one of its requirements coming from overseas. Baghdad had been captured; the enemy had been practically driven from the field in Mesopotamia; but were we any nearer obtaining a decision against Turkey as the result?

With no enemy within his reach, unable to maintain a further advance, what could General Maude do except to "uphold British influence in the Baghdad vilayet" by sitting there awaiting a counter offensive?

From the summer of 1917 onwards, the course of the campaign in Mesopotamia can be summarised very briefly. Fighting there was—and fighting of a very mobile kind—but strategically the situation in Mesopotamia itself underwent but little change. Early in the autumn it was quite obvious that nothing more could be expected of Russia, whose troops in the Caucasus and north-west Persia—without supplies, transport or money—were melting away, and that in the Middle East the issue lay entirely between Turkey and Great Britain.

For the Turks, in Mesopotamia the recapture of Baghdad had certain obvious political advantages, but strategically the value of the step seemed disproportionate to the expenditure required to carry it out, and it was still practically impossible that Mesopotamia should ever become a decisive theatre in the war with the British. In Palestine the situation possessed greater strategical possibilities. From the Turkish point of view, in Palestine there was an opportunity for launching another offensive against the Suez Canal; moreover, at Aleppo was the vital railway centre through which troops must pass on their way from the Constantinople area—the base of military enterprise—either to Mesopotamia or to the Sinai Peninsula and the Hedjaz.

It was, therefore, to Palestine rather than to Mesopotamia that the chief strategical interest attached. However, a Turkish winter offensive against Baghdad was in preparation, and General Maude knew that his enemy was improving communications and forming dumps of ammunition along the banks of the Euphrates from Dier ez Zor, through Ana and Hit to Ramadi. With a view to keeping the counter

offensive at arms' length, General Maude attacked the Turkish position at Ramadi in September. Owing to the unexpectedly great heat, a dense sandstorm, and the absence of drinking water, this attack failed, and for the moment no further action took place in Mesopotamia.

In Palestine, on the other hand, where hitherto we had been fighting to hold off the enemy from the Suez Canal, a British offensive was being prepared and when, on the 1st November, General Allenby began his advance, it met with so great a measure of success that in order to stem the tide the Turks diverted their reserves from Mesopotamia. Thus the "Yilderim" army, planned for the recapture of Baghdad, never came within the reach of General Maude, who now found himself virtually free of any threat of attack. Early in November he again attacked the enemy on the Euphrates, as well as on the Tigris and the Diyala, and advanced his positions to the general line of the gorge of the Jebel Hamrin on the Diyala, Tekrit on the Tigris, and Ramadi on the Euphrates.*

On the 19th November, General Maude died. There can be no finer memorial to him than the condition of his army and the success of his achievement. On the day of his death, his enemy lay beaten and demoralised far beyond Baghdad; his army, morally and physically fit, was filled with supreme confidence. To General Maude is due the greater proportion of the credit for this condition of affairs. His inspiring personality, his sincerity, his high sense of his responsibilities, his knowledge and his untiring personal activity had done more than merely win battles and organise affairs; they had gained for him the implicit trust and deep respect of subordinate commanders and troops—the greatest attribute of the commander.

Lieutenant-General Marshall, commanding the 3rd Corps, succeeded General Maude in the chief command. At the end of 1917 he found himself with a large, efficient Expeditionary Force opposed by the remnants of the Turkish Sixth Army (XIII and XVIII Corps), which was greatly his inferior in numbers, material and morale, and entirely without anxiety to give battle. At Kifri and Kirkuk, on the Tigris at Tekrit, on the Euphrates at Hit,* the enemy lay inert. No big strategical enterprise was open to General Marshall. Super-

* *Vide* **Map No. 2.**

ficially, it might appear possible for him to co-operate with the offensive in Palestine by advancing along the Euphrates. Actually, practical consideration of time, space, and administration made such a project quite out of the question. There was nothing left to him but to carry out a policy of defence. Nevertheless, by a series of spirited local offensives, General Marshall inflicted further defeat upon the enemy, and by the early summer of 1918 he succeeded in establishing his advanced positions on the general line Kifri—Tekrit—Salahiyah (about 15 miles north-west of Hit).* On the Euphrates, the whole of the enemy's 50th Division was captured, and by June the Sixth Army was reduced to a strength of about 9,000 rifles and 59 guns, the bulk of this strength being situated on the Tigris at the Fatha gorge, where the river runs through the spurs on the Jebel Hamrin.

In Palestine, during the winter, General Allenby had dealt the enemy a severe blow which now he was preparing to exploit, and Germany—hard pressed on the west—was able to do little to assist her Ally. Turkey began to falter.

Meanwhile, however, a new situation had arisen in the Caucasus, on the old Turko-Russian front. As we have seen, Russia had collapsed. Her forces in the Caucasus and in north-west Persia had dwindled almost to vanishing-point, and between the Caspian Sea and the northern frontier of Mesopotamia there lay a gap. Through the Caucasus, Baku and Krasnovodsk, thence into Trans-Caspia, Central Asia and Afghanistan,* Turkey could send her propaganda-missions towards India; by way of Bitlis, Van and Tabriz† her troops might invade Persia, both contingencies, being viewed with great apprehension by the Government of India.

To deal with the situation, a remarkably ambitious project was framed—nothing less than the reorganisation of the scattered remnants of the Russian, Caucasian and Armenian troops, which were struggling to exist in the southern Caucasus area, into an efficient force with which to oppose a Turko-German advance. It was proposed that the reorganisation should be carried out by a British politico-military mission, and a specially-selected officer, General Dunsterville, was appointed to form one. His instructions were to establish himself in Tiflis, the chief town in the Caucasian States of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, moving from Meso-

* *Vide* **Map No. 2.**

† *Vide* **Map No. 1.**

potamia by way of Kermanshah, Hamadan, Enzeli, the Caspian Sea and Baku.*

The mission was recruited and assembled in Baghdad in great secrecy. Early in January 1918, twelve officers and two clerks, travelling in Ford motor-vans and escorted by one armoured car, began their journey. The snow was still on the passes; the road—the very road by which Alexander the Great had marched to the Indus—was execrable; the mission made slow progress. On arriving at Enzeli, General Dunsterville received his first serious set-back; the local (Bolshevik) Caucasian Government refused to allow him to cross the Caspian Sea. Consequently, he was compelled to restrict his enterprise to Persia—for the time being. Nothing daunted by the initial failure of their design, the authorities at home defined the rôle of the mission—consisting, it will be remembered, of twelve officers and two clerks—as being "to "frustrate enemy penetration in north-west Persia." Accepting this modest task, General Dunsterville made his Headquarters at Hamadan where, at the end of March, some more officers and an escort of about thirty infantry arrived from Baghdad. Bolshevik activity against him increased; soon he found that he required further military support; and, at the end of May, troops were sent in Ford motor-vans from Mesopotamia to take over Kasvin (which commands the roads to Teheran from Tabriz and Enzeli) from the Russian garrison, which was leaving Persia.

By the middle of June, a little army, "Dunster Force," was existing in Persia at the end of a line of communication which consisted of some seven hundred miles of very bad road. There were several mountain passes (of which one rose to a height of seven thousand feet), to be crossed; all were liable to be completely blocked by snow; petrol for the convoys, and every article required by the troops had to be transported from Mesopotamia.

Meanwhile, a Turkish Army was slowly advancing through the Caucasus towards Baku. At the end of July, under the menace of the Turkish advance, the local Government in Baku collapsed, and its successors—revising its anti-British attitude—appealed for British aid in denying the town to the Turks. In reply to the appeal, a detachment of British Officers with an escort of one platoon of infantry embarked at Enzeli, crossed the Caspian Sea and, on the 4th August, landed at Baku. During August, they were followed by more troops,

* *Vide* Map No. 1.

amounting in all to about two thousand, and the force at once occupied a large portion of the perimeter defences of the town. One result of this action, unfortunately, was that the local army—apparently—felt itself absolved from further serious military responsibility; consequently, for six weeks British troops—practically unassisted—defended Baku against the heavy and repeated attacks of the Turks, who sustained heavy losses. By September, however, the enemy received reinforcements and renewed his attack with great violence. Every British rifle was put into the firing-line; the Russians and Armenians were so severely handled as to be incapable of further fighting. Had the defenders had a kick left in them a counter-attack must have succeeded—but no counter-attack was possible. All that could be done to avoid disaster to the British force was to withdraw it from Baku by night and to retire across the Caspian Sea to Persia. Here it was reinforced and reorganised and, as "Norperforce" remained in Persia to deal with a Turkish offensive thought to be coming from the direction of Tabriz and Mianeh.

The immense demands upon the resources of the Army in Mesopotamia made by this venture were considerably increased by the stampede of some fifty thousand of the local tribes, who fled before the Turkish advance in the Uramia* district. The refugees—men, women, children and cattle—arrived at Hamadan and there had to be organised in parties which were evacuated down the Persian line of communication to Baquba, where for two years they were maintained in a concentration-camp.

If we except this enterprise, the summer of 1918 in Mesopotamia passed uneventfully. New forward positions were prepared, of course, but activity was chiefly directed towards the reorganisation of rearward services and areas; the construction of roads, railways and quarters; setting up civil administration, and developing the general resources of the country.

Elsewhere, important events were happening. In France, the Allied offensive in August began to destroy in the Middle East the last vestiges of belief in the invincibility of Germany. Turkey, shorn of the moral and material aid of her Ally, was wavering—the time to deal her a decisive blow had come.

Now, in 1918, this blow could not be delivered in Mesopotamia any more than it could have been in 1914; between

* *Vide* Map No. 1.

General Marshall and the enemy's main military forces lay hundreds of miles of desert. In Palestine, on the other hand, he was within reach. In Palestine, therefore, the offensive against Turkey was renewed.

In September, General Allenby began his advance which at once brought about a westerly movement of the enemy's divisions in the Caucasus and Persia. The threats towards Persia from Baku and Tabriz died away, and the remnant of the Sixth Army was left in isolation on the Tigris.

General Marshall determined to dispose of it by attacking it in its position at the Fatha Gorge. His transport was considerably strained by the demands made upon it for the maintenance of "Norperforce" and for collecting the harvest on the Lower Euphrates, but, by withdrawing practically all transport vehicles from the formations and units which would not be actually engaged in the advance, he was just able to make and maintain a forward movement. By the middle of October he was ready. Shortage of land transport confined him to making a frontal attack up the Tigris instead of outflanking the Fatha position from the north, but by a bold and well-planned operation, he inflicted a heavy defeat upon the enemy. By dawn on October 30th, a large portion of the Sixth Army had been entirely surrounded by the British Cavalry and pursuit of the remainder had been organised. On November 1st, when the head of the British column had reached a point within twelve miles of Mosul, an Armistice with Turkey was declared. Two days later, in accordance with a clause in the terms of the Armistice, British troops entered Mosul.

The Campaign was over. In November, 1918, Mesopotamia from Mosul to the Persian Gulf, from the Kurdish mountains to the Syrian desert was under British sway. Militarily, Turkish influence was destroyed; politically, it was—for the moment—wiped out.

CHAPTER XI.

REFLECTIONS ON THE CAMPAIGN.

From comparing the figures given in Appendix A with those given in Appendix C, we can get a rough idea of the cost of the campaign in manpower and resources in 1914 and 1918, and at once the question occurs to us—was this expenditure justified by the effect it had upon the war as a whole?

The campaign in Mesopotamia was begun as a strictly limited enterprise, and was designed to bring about a definite politico-strategical result. That it expanded into an undertaking out of all proportion to that which originally had been foreseen is incontrovertible. That, in so doing, it made such serious demands upon Imperial forces and resources as seriously to hamper the conduct of a war which, in its initial form, it was designed to assist has frequently been alleged. To arrive at the degree of truth in this allegation let us begin by reviewing the essential aims of policy and strategy which dictated the course of events.

A military campaign is waged in order to enforce a policy. In 1914, the policy of Great Britain was to support France and to bring about the defeat of Germany and her Allies. Further, Great Britain sought to uphold this policy by securing the stabilisation of her position in India without having to call upon troops from Home—that is, by preventing Germany and Turkey from compromising her security in India by political or military action in the Middle East. She aimed at keeping India quiet, and Persia, Afghanistan and Arabia neutral—or at least not actively hostile. Finally, she desired the military defeat of her declared enemy, Turkey, in order to remove a menace to her communications with the East and leave her Ally, Russia, a free hand to concentrate upon the struggle with Germany.

To give effect to this policy in the Middle East, Great Britain initiated three campaigns:—one—an offensive—aimed at the vital centre of Turkey, Constantinople; one—a defensive—to protect the Suez Canal; and a third—an offensive defensive (offensive politically, defensive strategically)—to uphold her prestige at the head of the Persian Gulf and prevent a coalition between Turk and Arab. Of these three, the campaign in Mesopotamia was almost purely

political in its objects and in the effect which it was designed to have upon the general war-plan. Its purpose was to produce a definite political result in a limited territorial area and to protect one point of minor strategic importance—the Anglo-Persian Oilfields.

At first, then, British policy in Mesopotamia was defensive; it aimed at upholding an established political position, not at achieving military conquest. Turkey, on entering the war, became involved with her hereditary enemy, Russia, in a life-and death struggle in the Caucasus; in the Dardanelles a great issue was at stake; in Egypt she had a valuable strategical objective—the Suez Canal—within her reach. In the face of these obvious commitments it would have been ridiculous to suppose that she would detach a large portion of her army to carry on an objectless military campaign a thousand miles from Constantinople. Actually, during the whole war she never had more than six divisions in Mesopotamia at one time—six out of the fifty-two divisions which her army comprised. The chances of inflicting decisive military defeat on Turkey by a campaign in Mesopotamia were practically nil.

In its original conception, therefore, British policy was sound, and the limited political object of the campaign—with its objective, Basra—was within our military ability to attain.

Unfortunately this phase of policy came to an end all too quickly. Suddenly political aspirations became almost limitless, the objective of the campaign became Baghdad—for the reason that it was essential for ensuring the security of India.

Let us analyse what it was that we feared for India. At no time—not even in 1916, when the Commander-in-Chief in India prophesied the extension of the war eastwards to the frontiers of India—could it seriously have been visualised that a Turko-German army would march through the Caucasus, across the Caspian, through Transcaspia, or by way of Baghdad, Teheran and Kabul, to invade India. Political—not military—action, from Islamic propaganda, designed to bring about tribal rising without, and ferments within our Oriental Empire, *that* was the danger to India.

It was argued that by occupying Baghdad we should dam the flow of propaganda, and raise British prestige so high that neither Turk nor Arab, Persian nor Afghan could damage it. Prestige is an abstract quality, intangible, elusive; it must be founded on something more solid than mere bluff—and policy, unsupported by the means of enforcing

itself, *is* bluff. In 1914, the day had already passed when the simple-minded Oriental could be imposed upon by empty threats. So long as the Basra Vilayet was held in adequate military force, so long did British prestige stand unshaken locally. The first phase of our policy and our strategy was sound because it aimed at producing clearly-defined results by a definite military expenditure which was not beyond the power of India to make. When, in 1915, policy ran riot and outstripped the restrictions which sound strategy placed upon it prestige began to wane.

The second phase in the policy—the advance to Baghdad—was unsound, because results which were without definite political or military advantage to the conduct of the war as a whole were sought, results which could be safely obtained only by a military expenditure that it was beyond the ability of India to meet—an expenditure which made heavy demands upon the resources of the Empire.

Ultimately, after many vicissitudes of Fortune, this phase did end in complete success. Mesopotamia was occupied by a British Army, and administered by British Political Officers; Labour Corps toiled at railways, roads and hutments. Where for six centuries the desert had lain waste, corn was made to grow. The country was regenerated. But at what an expenditure!

If the occupation of Baghdad, and of Mosul, *were* necessary for the safety of India it was a necessity so drastic as to remind one of the remedy of bleeding. India—the Empire—were bled white in order that India might survive.

Granted that the security of India was an entirely justified aim of British policy in the Middle East; granted that the protection of the oilfields and of the territorial area at the head of the Persian Gulf were political and strategical necessities in Mesopotamia, would not it have been better had policy and strategy remained content with military penetration into Mesopotamia as far as the line Ahwaz—Amara—Nasiriyeh, and no further?

To have effectively occupied the Basra vilayet up to this limit, and to have denied to the enemy the approaches to Basra by the Tigris and the Euphrates, would have been within the capability of a force of two divisions and a cavalry brigade, with a proportionate allocation of armoured cars and aeroplanes.

Within this limit, communications could have been improved, defences organised, accommodation built, at a tithe

of the expenditure of manpower, money and resources which ultimately were involved by the advance up the Tigris.

In firm occupation of the delta of the Shatt al Arab, blocking the only approaches by which the enemy could advance to the attack, and able to get ample warning of his coming, the force would have been able and ready to move rapidly and certainly to oppose any offensive or to undertake punitive measures against recalcitrant tribesmen.

Moreover, as has already been pointed out, it was in the highest degree unlikely that Turkey would or could stage a serious offensive against Basra—for the very reasons which made General Nixon's headlong rush up the river so costly and, in the long run, futile.

Lastly, in the event of its becoming necessary to send reinforcements to Mesopotamia, troops—earmarked for the purpose—could have been embarked in India and rapidly transported to Basra, where they would have disembarked under the protection of the covering position on the Ahwaz—Amara line.

Would this plan have produced the desired effect upon India? Baghdad was the centre of hostile propaganda.

If an extension of hostile activity towards India—whether by propaganda or by troops—was feared, was not the soundest step to checkmate it by improving military conditions and strategical communications within India herself?

Had we, with our traditions of administration in India, our boasted knowledge of the East, any real reason to fear Turkish propaganda? Were we, our prestige substantiated by an obvious military preparedness and by *gold,* not at least equally capable of effective propaganda? We could have bought Turkey, or half Asia, for what it cost us to get to Baghdad. It was December, 1916, before an effective force had been organised for the capture of the city. Had the same amount of time and half the amount of resources been spent in India, every bazaar from Peshawar to Madras would have resounded with the power and might of the Sirkar—whereas the capture of Baghdad left them comparatively unstirred. With money and resources to spend, we should have been in a position to handle the eternal problem of the north west frontier more effectively than ever before, and to destroy once and for all the chimera of an extension of the war into India.

So much for the first aim of British policy in the Middle East. As for the second, the overthrow of Turkey, our attitude in Mesopotamia could affect that but little, unless Turkey were foolish enough to divert *her* resources from the

decisive point to a secondary theatre of war. Turkey was not to be beaten in Mesopotamia—a handful of her troops might be.

From the first, this fact was appreciated—though subsequently it was somewhat lost sight of—and a decision was sought elsewhere.

Turkey was attacked by Russia in the Caucasus, while Great Britain carried out her protective measures in Mesopotamia and in Egypt. Then, at the Dardanelles, we aimed a blow at the vital centre, a blow which just failed to get home because the enemy was a little better prepared to parry it than we were to deliver it. Subsequently, the weight of attack shifted to the Tigris and to Palestine.

There was, however, another vital point at which, in 1914, Turkey was *not* prepared—Alexandretta, the port of Aleppo. Aleppo was the centre of communications (at first only by road, later by rail) between Constantinople and the various battle-fronts, but at the beginning of the war the Turks had no considerable force there, nor could they concentrate one rapidly, because the tunnel on the Constantinople railway through the Taurus mountains was unfinished. As a combined Naval and Military operation, a landing in the Gulf of Alexandretta presented no insuperable difficulties—indeed it was looked upon as a feasible and desirable proposition both at the War Office and at General Headquarters in Egypt.

However, the plan for landing a force on the Gallipoli peninsula was already being formed, and the suggestion to strike at Aleppo sank into oblivion. In 1916, when it appeared as if the Turks might advance upon Egypt, it was revived, but by then the opportunity had passed. The enemy was on the alert, the tunnel through the Taurus mountains was completed, the railway was working, hostile submarines were in the Mediterranean. No longer was the operation feasible.

Had we concentrated our efforts upon landing a force in the Gulf of Alexandretta when first the proposition was mooted, it is possible—even probable—that we should have succeeded in producing a far greater effect upon the Turko-German war-plans in the Middle East than we did by the costly and abortive attempt to force the Dardanelles; as a corollary, the problem in Mesopotamia would have been solved.

Destructive criticism—especially in the light of after events—is usually easy. The criticism attempted in the foregoing paragraphs is intended to be constructive. In essentials it amounts to this:—

That in Mesopotamia British policy should have remained consistently defensive, and contented itself with the achievement and consolidation of its original objects. That, in conformity with this defensive policy, strategy should have limited the scope of the campaign to the establishment and consolidation of an adequate military position covering the delta of the Shatt al Arab and the Anglo-Persian oilfields; *e.g.* up to and including the line Ahwaz—Amara—Nasiriyeh.

By this definite limitation of policy and strategy, an immense and uneconomical expenditure of manpower, resources and shipping would have been avoided, while our interests in the Middle East would not have suffered.

As for the war as a whole, the saving achieved by limiting the expenditure in Mesopotamia would have allowed our political and strategical situation in India to have been so much strengthened that outside threats could have been viewed without apprehension, and would have prevented a very large diversion of general resources from the main theatre of war.

From the study of the campaign there are some valuable lessons to be learned.

First comes the interdependence of policy and strategy. Policy dictates, strategy enforces—if it can. The point is, that the two are mutually dependent because if strategy cannot safely attempt to enforce a policy, then policy—if it relies on force—must be modified.

Thus, policy says "We want Baghdad"; strategy says "Militarily, it is sound—or unsound—to go to Baghdad." In the first phase of the campaign, *i.e.* up to the capture and consolidation of Basra, policy and strategy were in agreement. Then came the proposal to advance to Baghdad, when at first strategy said "No." Later, strategy—unsoundly—came into line with policy, and disaster followed. In 1916, after the fall of Kut, policy said "stay in the forward "position." Strategy, voiced by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, the responsible military adviser of the Empire, said:—"From a military point of view withdrawal is the "right thing to do, and politically it seems far preferable to "a continuance of the attempt to carry out a policy of extreme "difficulty which promises at best but a very poor return for "the heavy price we may have to pay." Policy carried the day.

One great difficulty exists in the relationship between the two. It is that the policy of the Empire is formulated by

the Cabinet—necessarily a body with a non-military mind, while technical advice on Imperial strategy is the responsibility of the Naval, Military and Air advisers, who will always tend to be in the minority in a committee chiefly made up of civilian members.

In this particular campaign, an additional difficulty was introduced by the fact that at first the policy of the Cabinet was communicated through the Secretary of State for India to the Viceroy who, through the Commander-in-Chief in India and the Commander in the field, sought to give effect to it quite independently of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff. The first duty of the Imperial General Staff is to co-ordinate the action of Imperial forces in the various theatres of war. It was this lack of co-ordination of effort at the beginning of the war which allowed the disproportionate development of "side-shows" at the expense of the main theatre.

Next, comes the interdependence of strategy, tactics and administration. This obvious truth has never been better illustrated than in this campaign. So long as strategy was commensurate with the ability to maintain the army (*i.e.* during the defensive phase) so long was the general situation reasonably sound, but directly administration failed to keep pace with the ambitions of strategy, disaster followed, because troops could not be concentrated at the right time and place, mobility and power of surprise were lost and movement could not be maintained.

An administrative problem requiring constant forethought was the maintenance of morale. The climate was bad; discomfort was inevitable; there was no short leave and very little long leave; at times food was insufficient; medical arrangements were bad; leave arrangements in India left a lot to be desired; recreations were few; postal services were most irregular, and the unseasoned soldiers of a citizen army, or of the Indian village, suffered a great deal from the feeling of isolation produced by the endless emptiness of the desert. To combat the demoralising influence of these factors, was one of the most difficult functions of the administrative staff.

These are only a very few of the lessons by which the campaign in Mesopotamia will repay study. Its operations and its difficulties were of a type such as might confront us again at any moment. Unless those difficulties are studied, unless they are met before and not after they occur; unless the essentials of the problem are appreciated before the solution is begun, the mistakes made in 1914-18 will recur.

Before the Great War, the campaign in Mesopotamia would have been considered a vast undertaking—the personnel engaged in it was far more numerous than that of the original British Expeditionary Force. In the immensity of a world-struggle, it was a mere drop in the ocean— a "side show."

In spite of this; in spite of mistakes made by civilian and soldier alike; in spite of the horrors after Ctesiphon, the miseries of the wounded after Hanneh, the heat, the sickness, the desolation of the empty desert, and the ninety-seven thousand casualties that the campaign cost, the troops that fought in Mesopotamia can rest secure in the knowledge that they added imperishable glory to the record of the Imperial Army.

128597

D
568.5
E8

Evans, Roger.
A brief outling of the campaign in Mesopotamia.

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT TYLER
D568.5.E8
A brief outline of the campaign in Mesop
0 00 01 0045350 5